

THE USE OF IDEAS AND IDEOLOGIES IN THE CHARACTERIZATION
AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE EARLY NOVELS
OF CHRISTINA STEAD.

by

GREGORY HILL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1 Introduction	1
2 <u>Seven Poor Men of Sydney</u>	4
3 <u>The Saliburg Tales</u>	40
4 <u>The Beutlers and Perles</u>	57

This thesis is entirely my own work.

Conclusion

Gregory Hill
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GREGORY HILL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1 Introduction	1
2 <u>Seven Poor Men of Sydney</u>	4
3 <u>The Salzburg Tales</u>	49
4 <u>The Beauties and Furies</u>	53
5 <u>House of All Nations</u>	74
6 Conclusion	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY	119

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. *Christie's Mystery Magazine* has been published since 1925. It is a monthly magazine of detective fiction. The first issue was published in January 1925. The magazine has been published ever since. It is one of the most popular detective magazines in the world.

2. *Seven Years of Mystery* is a book by Robert B. Parker. It is a collection of stories from the magazine. It was published in 1932. It is one of the best books of detective fiction ever published. It is a must-read for anyone who likes detective fiction.

The appearance in recent years of a paperback edition of The Man Who Loved Children¹ -- a Penguin "Modern Classics" edition - has contributed to a growing awareness among Australian readers of the international recognition that the work of Christina Stead now commands. To many Australian readers of this edition it may have come as a surprise to find that Christina Stead was born and raised in this country. In the past Stead has generally been considered worthy of mention in histories of Australian literature as the author of Seven Poor Men of Sydney,² her first novel, which has long been regarded as something of a landmark of modernism in the Australian novel. Stead left Australia at quite an early age, however, and all of her novels have been written and published, and most of them set, in foreign countries. It was inevitable, then, but nonetheless unfortunate that her later achievements in the novel were largely overlooked by Australian critics, who apparently ceased to regard Stead and her novels as part of Australia's literary tradition.

New American and British editions of some of her major novels appeared in the 1960's, and these gave rise to renewed international acclaim, best illustrated perhaps by Randall Jarrell's enthusiastic essay on The Man Who Loved Children, which is appended to the Penguin edition of that novel. Of course, soft-cover publication is usually the most effective means of popularizing an author's work, and in Stead's case this followed soon after the new hard-cover editions of her work, most importantly, in the international context, with the Penguin "Modern Classics" edition of The Man Who Loved Children, which appeared in 1970. Australian readers derived great benefit from the renewed international interest in Stead's work. In the early 1970's Angus and Robertson followed up the paperback editions of

1. Christina Stead, The Man Who Loved Children (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970). Hereafter all references to this novel will be to this edition.

2. Seven Poor Men of Sydney (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1965). Hereafter all references to this novel will be to this edition, and quotations will be acknowledged, by chapter and page number, in the text.

Stead's work that they published in the 1960's with additional soft-cover editions of her work, with the result that a wide range of Stead's work is now freely available here. There are still some conspicuous gaps in the range of novels available - especially House of All Nations¹ and For Love Alone² - but these will surely be filled before long.³

Alongside this recent upsurge of publishing activity, there has been some measure of corresponding critical activity in relation to Stead's work. R.G. Geering's monograph, in the Twayne's World Authors Series, anticipated many of the new paperback editions, but still remains the only book-length study of Stead's work available.⁴ While this book is primarily an introduction to Stead's work, and of limited usefulness to a serious study of it, it is nonetheless an important contribution to the contemporary critical effort, as it gives attention to the entirety of Stead's work that was published at its time of writing, and by doing so it points to the urgent need for a concerted critical effort to interpret and evaluate individual novels in the context of Stead's total literary production, which is now a very substantial one by any criterion. This effort is needed in order to redress the imbalance that has been created by the narrowly nationalistic critical approach of the past, with its almost exclusive concentration on those parts of Stead's fiction that have Australian settings.

This study will attempt to contribute to that effort by examining Stead's earlier work in chronological sequence,

1. House of All Nations (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966). Hereafter all references to this novel will be to this edition, and quotations will be acknowledged, by chapter and page number, in the text.

2. For Love Alone (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1966). Hereafter all references to this novel will be to this edition.

3. In fact a new edition of For Love Alone has just been published by Virago. The author has not been able to obtain details of it at the time of writing.

4. R.G. Geering, Christina Stead (New York : Twayne, 1969).

with an emphasis on a particular aspect of her development as a novelist in the formative period of her long literary career. Her first three novels, Seven Poor Men of Sydney, The Beauties and Furies,¹ and House of All Nations, will be dealt with at some length, and brief attention will be given to her first collection of short stories, The Salzburg Tales.² The particular interest of this study is in Stead's use of ideas, beliefs, and elaborated ideologies in the following ways - as a means of presenting and understanding character, as a basis for dramatic and structural contrasts, and finally as a means of developing the overall polemical thrust of each novel.

CHAPTER 2

SEVEN POOR MEN OF SYDNEY

1. The Beauties and Furies (London : Peter Davies, 1936). Hereafter all references to this novel will be to this edition, and quotations will be acknowledged, by chapter and page number, in the text.

2. The Salzburg Tales (Sydney : Angus and Robertson 1974). Hereafter all references to this collection of stories will be to this edition, and quotations will be acknowledged, by story title and page number, in the text.

Although Seven Poor Men of Sydney has received a considerable amount of critical attention over the years - perhaps more than any other of Stead's novels - it remains a difficult novel to encompass with any single critical approach, and indeed a difficult novel to apprehend as a unity. One critic - Dorothy Green - has even asserted that all attempts to do so are futile:

A novel is not a picture, as H.G. Wells observed, and there is no point in attempting to apprehend it, when one does not have to, in a single act of perception. This novel defies all such attempts; it demands consecutive acts of attention, not a simultaneous set of responses.¹

The article from which this extract is taken is surely one of the most perceptive that has been written about Seven Poor Men, but one cannot avoid suspecting that this passage, coming as it does at the end of the article, is as much an expression of exasperation with the approach to the novel suggested in it as it is of a firmly held critical axiom. What gives weight to this suspicion is the fact that an attempt "to apprehend ... in a single act of perception" is made in the body of the article. Parts of the article will repay closer examination in the present context, as they reveal some of the problems that the novel presents to the critic and create a desire in the reader for a more satisfactory approach, which is what the present study hopes to offer.

Green's ingenious approach to the novel is based on the assumptions that Catherine Baguenault is a projection of the author herself, and that "Catherine, not Michael, is the real centre of the book".² She asserts that some of the problems that critics have encountered in dealing with the novel immediately disappear when these assumptions are granted.

1. Dorothy Green, "Chaos or a Dancing Star", Meanjin, XXVII, 2 (1968), 161.

2. Ibid., 153.

The problem that has troubled critics, that each character uses basically the same voice and that each is continually commenting on and explaining one of his associates to another, as well as explaining himself to others, presents no difficulty if one sees the book as an attempt to objectify and vocalize an inner world, to dramatize, for solo performance, the eternal argument between the selves that make up the self. The inner world, in short, is the world not of seven men and a woman, but of one woman, Catherine, whose selves have been separated and given a local habitation and a name.¹

She goes on to give what appears to be a plausible biographical reason why, in her words, "Christina Stead breaks up the self into a number of characters in order to see what it might become":²

Geering tells us that Christina Stead wrote this novel when she was desperately ill, in order to 'leave something'....It is not surprising that at the moment in which the dissolution of the self becomes a probability, an artist should make a supreme effort to sum it up and assess its potentialities.³

While the article is an extremely perceptive and illuminating one on the whole, it must be clear from these passages that the approach suggested in it is fraught with problems, and indeed raises more problems than it eliminates. Briefly, the two most damning objections that can be made to this approach are, firstly, that the identification of Stead with Catherine and the proposition that Catherine is "the real centre of the novel" are at odds both with the novel itself, in which Catherine is, on the face of it, a minor, if not insignificant character, and with Stead's own comments on the novel, in which she has denied any identification with Catherine and asserted that Joseph -

1. Ibid., 154.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 154-5

and not Michael nor Catherine - is "the real hero of the book";¹ secondly, by turning the novel outside-in, as it were, and regarding it as essentially an interior, subjective drama, Green has not invalidated the objection to the lack of individuated voices, but merely forced its proponents to rephrase it. After all, the inversion from objective to subjective that she suggests could be applied to any novel and the outcome would be the same : the novel itself would remain entirely unaltered.

Other critics have had more success in identifying structural principles in the novel. R.G. Geering is surely closer to the truth when he asserts that

What gives the apparently haphazard structure a unity of its own is the deep conflict between different views and ways of life - this is the book's central, informing idea....one of Christina Stead's most favored structural devices is the building through contrasting characters and ideas.²

Strangely enough, Green also recognizes the importance of ideas in the novel, and goes further than Geering in emphasizing their importance, in a passage that seems to sit uncomfortably beside her description of the novel as a "lyric cry in novel form"³ - "it is a novel or a kind of meditative lyric about ideas rather than people" (my emphasis).⁴ Accurate as this assessment is, it is probably worth suggesting here that the distinction in Stead's mind between ideas and people had been considerably blurred at the time of writing the novel by her encounter with a man of ideas, her future husband William Blake, who appears in the novel as Baruch Mendelssohn.⁵ This is a far more fruitful area for biographical conjecture than the one that Green explored, and it will be returned to later in the discussion.

1. "Christina Stead : An Interview", Australian Literary Studies, VI, 3 (1974), 241.

2. Geering, op.cit., p.38.

3. Green, op.cit., 153.

4. Ibid., 159.

5. Interview in A.L.S., 241

Both Green and Geering emphasize the importance of ideas in the novel, but in going on to suggest that contrasting ideas and characters are a "favored structural device" of Stead's, Geering makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of Seven Poor Men and indeed of Stead's work as a whole. Indeed, this study will attempt to demonstrate the validity of this assertion, not only in relation to Seven Poor Men, but also in relation to the novels that followed it.

To return to Seven Poor Men, Green's observation that the novel is concerned with "ideas rather than people" is hardly an exaggeration; the author seems to be more interested in ideas for their own sake in this novel than in any other. Indeed the problem of the lack of consistently individuated voices to which Green refers can be accounted for by linking it with the almost passionate interest in ideas and polemics that Stead reveals in this novel. A biographical basis for this fascination with ideas has been suggested, but while it is proposed quite seriously, and will be frequently alluded to in this discussion, it can, fortunately, remain a suggestion and not an assumption. This is because the internal evidence of the powerful influence of an intelligent, articulate person intensely interested in and productive of ideas is so overwhelming that no external, biographical confirmation is needed; discussion of this influence does not rely on any biographical conjecture for its validity.

In terms of characters in the novel, Baruch is the main mouthpiece for the expression of the ideas in which Stead is so strongly interested, and is, according to her, a portrait of William Blake.¹ Any reading of the novel would reveal that Baruch is a character of unique importance in the novel. As this point will be discussed in more detail later on, it is sufficient merely to suggest here that there is a lack of proper distancing between the author and

1. Ibid.

Baruch, and that this leads to the inclusion of too many long polemical speeches by him that are probably of more interest to the author than to the reader, as they lack the authorial irony that they need to prevent them from being tiresome, or, worse still, alienating harangues. While Baruch is the major mouthpiece of these polemics, he is by no means the only one. In fact the novel is permeated by the sort of rationalist - humanist thinking that he expounds. So eager is Stead to subject the reader to Baruchian expositions that she uses even Michael Baguenault as a mouthpiece for them. In so doing, she compromises one of the novel's central structural contrasts - between Baruch and his rationalism, and Michael and his essentially mystical understanding of the world. That she was led into such a lapse of control is an indication of just how fully her imagination was dominated by this way of thinking, and of the extent to which it permeates the novel.

It has just been mentioned that there is a counter-balancing, contrasting figure set against Baruch in the novel - Michael Baguenault. That these two figures and the ideas that they represent form the central structural contrast of the novel is one of the major propositions to be put forward in this discussion; elaboration of this proposition will form a major part of it. Stead herself has said, however, that Joseph Baguenault is central to the novel:

Joseph Baguenault ... was the one I felt most deeply about, the man who had no beliefs, no position, no hope, but kept on bravely. He's the real hero of the book.¹

As will soon become clear, there is no real conflict here. The "Endpiece" - where the action of the novel is restated as Joseph's journey through a violent storm and safe arrival home - makes it clear that it is Joseph's course of development in the novel that is at the centre of the author's attention. The fact that Stead ventured to clarify this in such a way suggests that she felt that the humble figure of Joseph was largely obscured by the violence of the "storm" around him in the novel itself. Of course, this is exactly

1. Ibid.

what happens in a first reading of the novel. Without the "Endpiece", the reader would be inclined to regard Michael's story as the novel's main centre of interest, as he is certainly the novel's most powerful and memorable character. This is an unsatisfactory view, however, as it makes the novel seem structurally lopsided and dramatically unresolved. The sensible approach, surely, is to accept, at least tentatively, the author's apparent prompting, and to take a closer look at Joseph's career in the novel. The present study will adopt this approach, but will incorporate it into its overall emphasis on, and interest in the novel's use of contrasts of ideas and characters as one of its structural principles.

Much of this discussion of Seven Poor Men will be centred on Joseph, because as the "Endpiece" suggests, Joseph's course through the "storm" of conflicting ideas and views of life is at least as important as the ideas and characters that constitute the "storm". Of course attention must be given to these conflicting forces, and Baruch and Michael, as the most important of these, will also receive considerable attention. Perhaps it is appropriate, however, to begin the discussion with some consideration of the background against which Joseph's encounter with these ideological forces takes place. The social, economic, political, historical and ideological backgrounds are all of assistance to an understanding of Joseph's particular situation, but his more immediate background of personal friends and relatives is of no less importance. Not surprisingly, perhaps, most of these minor characters also have fairly clearly defined ideological positions, and form part of the ideological "storm" through which Joseph passes. The minor characters are of considerable interest, particularly in the context of Stead's work as a whole, as there is an interplay in them between ideology and character - their ideological pronouncements are characterizing, and their personalities reflect on and characterize the ideological positions they occupy - that is largely absent from the presentation of the major characters. This technique, with its accompanying ironies, later becomes one of Stead's most distinctive and most successful means of presenting her

characters. Before the discussion turns to them, however, it must consider the more general setting of Joseph's story.

Probably the most obvious quality of the socio-economic setting of the novel - even the title alerts the reader to it - is the material poverty that prevails over a large proportion of the community in which the action takes place. Michael Wilding has suggested that the "theme" of poverty is the only one that gives the novel any unity,¹ and while this may be an overstatement of its importance, it cannot be denied that the poverty that prevails in both the background and the foreground darkens the mood of the novel as a whole. It also makes the optimism of Baruch hard for some of the characters to accept, as it is so much at odds with the miserable reality of grinding poverty that they know. When Catherine tells Baruch "'Your renaissance is too hard for me, there are too many pangs, and your new world is too sane for me'" (Chap.11, p.311) the reader senses that, as well as the reasons that she gives for this attitude, there is another, a powerful, underlying one: in the world of misery, poverty and despair in which Catherine lives, there is no basis for any hope of a brighter future.

As for the widespread poverty in the general community, it would be unprofitable to enumerate the many passing references to it. The most effective device in establishing a pervasive atmosphere of physical hardship is the recurring image, such as that of destitute, homeless people trying to keep warm, and to sleep, in the open. This is touched on finally in the "Endpiece" when, during the storm, the reader is reminded that "the poor people who sleep under the wharves in Ultimo ... move their rags closer to the bank, and rats leave their holes" (p.318). Earlier, when Catherine and Fulke Folliot are walking in the Domain they notice that "In a cave two unemployed men, rolled in newspapers, lay behind the embers of a small fire" (Chap.5, p.135). The striking seamen living in Communist Hall present another

1. Michael Wilding, "Christina Stead's Australian Novels", Southerly, XXVII, 1(1967), 26.

variation of this powerful recurring image: "Round the wall some of the seamen were already sleeping, with their coats under their heads, and bits of blankets and variegated rags over them" (Chap.6, p.172).

Widespread poverty and unemployment : both are symptoms of sickness in the capitalist system, and of course pose an even more serious threat to its survival by creating bitterness among the working classes against those in positions of wealth and power, and against the capitalist system itself. This leads in turn to solidarity among the working classes, to organization and political activity. There is plenty of evidence of this process in Seven Poor Men. The strike by seamen, at that time "the very tail of the workers, ignorant, wretchedly paid, put-upon and misled", runs its course through the novel (Chap.6, p.174). Joseph, and the reader, hear speeches at Communist Hall concerned with the strike, and overhear a discussion of strike tactics at the home of Ross, a union leader. Catherine is involved in fund-raising for the Labour Party, and in the publication of the "International Worker", the left-wing newspaper edited by Fulke Folliot. As all this suggests, much of the novel is set in the milieu of left-wing political activism, and, of course, some of the characters are themselves committed Marxists, Tom Winter being the most totally committed of them. Baruch also favours a Marxist politico-economic analysis, and, as the novel's most articulate spokesman on these matters, he gives the best analysis of the absurdities of the contemporary Australian economic recession, and the needless suffering it has caused.

'But here,' cried Baruch, 'in this country where you are technically all free, where you all vote and think yourselves political governors, where the land is free and you have no complications, if it weren't for your crazy bounties to protect what won't grow cheaply and your tariffs as high as the moon to protect the uneconomic industries of cheap capitalists, you should live in an earthly paradise : you shouldn't have to think of any other heaven. And what do we see? Beggars, tramps, thousands of workless in misery, poor mothers whelping yearly generations who get wretcheder, gaols full of criminals, madhouses of madmen, extravagance, superstition. You might as well be in the depths of Bulgaria.'

(Chap.3, pp.89-90)

Kol Blount gives a poetic assessment of the contemporary Australian malaise in his remarkable speech entitled "In Memoriam" - dedicated to Michael, who has just committed suicide. This is, in fact, a poetic history of Australia from its birth to the novel's present. It ends in anti-climax, as the momentum created by the pioneer ethic disappears and the modern urban Australian finds himself in an ideological vacuum.

'And after all this notable pioneer tale of starvation, sorrow, escapades, mutiny, death, labour in common, broad wheatlands, fat sheep, broad cattle-barons, raw male youth and his wedding to the land, in the over-populated metropolis the sad-eyed youth sits glumly in a hare-brained band, and speculates upon the suicide of youth, the despair of the heirs of yellow heavy-headed acres. What a history is that; what an enigma is that?'

(Chap.11, p.308)

While Michael was unable to find a faith to replace the lost pioneering faith, it is clear that some of the characters at least have found in Marxism an ideology that makes the future worth working for; it has taken the place left vacant by the vanished pioneer ethic. Of course, another faith that has an important place in the novel, particularly in Joseph's life, is Christianity. Apart from Joseph, who loses his Christian faith in the course of the novel, it is only ignorant, aging mothers who cling to it. In the novel as a whole the Christian religion is shown to be moribund, incapable of reconciling people any longer to the suffering that fills their lives. According to Baruch, and the novel as a whole seems to endorse his view, religion among the poor people around him is one of the "evils added to their burden of poverty" - a delusion that adds a debilitating psychological poverty to their material poverty (Chap.5, p.140).

Discussion of Joseph's Christian faith will come later, but perhaps it is appropriate at this stage to consider briefly the faiths of some of the minor characters of the novel, particularly the mothers of Michael and Joseph. The efforts of Michael's mother to ensure her salvation are revealed early in the novel. In an incident that seems to

have been conceived with the specific purpose of giving Michael an opportunity to attack the Church, Michael's mother and her priest are presented in a heavily ironic, comical way.

His mother, who had stayed away from Church for years to please her husband, was now about forty-five and began to have vagaries. She read books of religious edification and spent all her household money on charitable fêtes and collections. A nosing priest found Mrs Baguenault in this state of mind and came to visit her every morning, to have tea, talk scandal and improve her chances of salvation :...

(Chap.1, pp.17-18)

The priest is presented as physically grotesque, and a humorous scene follows, in which Michael denounces the Christian religion with rationalistic arguments that should really have been voiced by Baruch. The faith of Joseph's mother is presented in a slightly less sceptical and unsympathetic way, perhaps because Joseph, unlike Michael, actually shares her faith throughout his childhood and into maturity. Once again, however, the Christian religion is presented as the refuge of simple minded, middle-aged women who have never known worldly happiness and have ceased to hope for it.

The cheap print which hung over the piano showing Jesus with his sacred heart, in three colours out of register, blood, thorns, a nightgown, worn hands and tears, represented her own life as she knew it and as she was not ashamed to record it. Then, she went to Church to know what was going on in the world, to know what view to take, as people used to go to panoramas, bad paintings artificially lighted in a little round hall, to find out what the country was like that lay about them. She saw the workaday world through a confessional grille, as a weevil through the hole he has gnawed in a nut. It might have opened to the thrust, that grille, if she had had the will, or if her husband had had the patience to teach her; but he had not, he thought too little of her brains.

(Chap.3, pp.65-66)

The function of her religion as a shelter from the outside world is depicted here, but the inner nature of her faith is presented in a similarly sceptical and jocular fashion:

Within, her heart was a stuffed chasuble continually repeating 'Om, Om,' with censers swinging and the tin cash-box clinking, making a sort of perpetual low mass in her soul - if she had a soul; but it was no soul, it was a dried leaf. It had once fluttered on the tree, but that was in spring; now it was winter.

(Chap.3, p.66)

The foregoing account of the two mothers' faiths supports the suggestion made earlier that one of the objections to the Christian faith that runs through the novel - and eventually plays an important part in Joseph's rejection of it - is that it fails to account for, or even come to grips with the gratuitous burden of suffering that is imposed on ordinary, blameless people. Michael best expresses this particular objection in a passage that is not only very powerful but, unlike his rationalistic attacks on the Church, is also completely in character. He is replying to his mother's condemnation of Catherine's and his wild and Godless behaviour.

'Let us alone, Mother. I am thinking in terms of reality, the only ones I know. I suffer; Catherine, poor girl, suffers, and fights; you too. God didn't help you through your labour-pains. That is real, realer than the fantasies of a dreaming God. If he were present, as you say, he would know the degree of misery in a household, the pain of drowning in a fog, firedamp in a mine, cancer, the degree of pain even in a poor creature like me, for instance: all too heady for the thin vessels we are. Are we to be damned for such cruel potions and purges put by him in a phial too weak to hold them? We burst in pieces on the floor. God, anything we can seize here on earth is too little to recompense us for what we suffer.'

(Chap.1, p.31)

This passage is of the utmost importance, as it not only sums up very powerfully one of the most pervasive ideas in the novel, but at the same time it very forcefully projects the distinctive outlook of Michael Baguenault; indeed Michael's outlook is well encapsulated in the sentence -

"I am thinking in terms of reality, the only ones I know."

As all of these passages indicate, the Christian faith is generally presented quite unsympathetically in the novel. The author goes to some pains to present Christianity as a

moribund faith, out of touch with the real world. Indeed the novel as a whole seems to endorse Baruch's view that it is worse than useless - an unnecessary addition to the burden of miseries borne by the poor. Joseph is the only major character to adhere to the Christian faith in adult life, but while his faith is presented without undercutting irony, it is clear that his loss of faith is to be regarded as a process of enlightenment, and as an entirely laudable achievement. While Joseph's religion is tolerated while it endures, the novel as a whole is clearly intended as something of anti-Christian polemic in support of Baruch's Marxian view of it as "the opium of the people".

It was mentioned earlier that in her presentation of some of the minor characters, Stead introduces a technique that is later to become extremely important in her novels - a technique of playing a character and his ideological position against one another in a mutually characterizing way. Clearly this technique was not applied in the presentation of the two Mrs. Baguenaults. Where it is most prominent in Seven Poor Men is in the presentation of the minor characters of Marxist or left-wing political persuasions. The characters to whom this approach is applied are Tom Winter, Fulke and Marion Folliot, and Catherine Baguenault. Authorial comment on the relationship between personality and ideology in these characters is usually presented indirectly, through the voice of another character. In this novel the technique remains relatively undeveloped, and amounts to only one or two comments in relation to each of these characters. Of course, one perceptive comment is worth ten obtuse ones, and can permanently modify the reader's perception of its object, and this is generally the case in the examples that follow, where the sources of the comments - Joseph and Baruch - are the novel's most reliable observers.

The presentation of Tom Winter is marred, as Michael Wilding has pointed out,¹ by Stead's unsuccessful attempt at rendering phonetically his characteristic accent. The following passage illustrates this unfortunate attempt, as well as illustrating Winter's bitterness against "the system".

1. Ibid., 24.

It is representative of Winter's attempts to enlighten Joseph about the truth of his situation, but is particularly important in terms of the relationship of the two, as it contains the moment when Joseph first pauses to think about Winter and his Marxist ideas. He concludes that, although they are persuasive and sincerely held, some doubt remains about Winter's motives in his attacks on the status quo, about the causes of the profound bitterness that lies behind them.

Joseph felt surprised. This acerbity - Winter was poverty-stricken, and had had a horrible accident once, the spoke of a delivery van had run into his leg, and perhaps his leg always hurt him. He had no use for the dignity of work, endurance, saving. Joseph felt his heart thud. Winter sounded right. He had had no idea that these ideas were actually a passion with anyone; with Baruch, of course, but Baruch was a phenomenon, but a plain poor working man like Winter. - He felt a great thirst and desire.
(Chap.6, p.171)

Of course, Joseph's reflections reveal as much about himself as they do about Winter, but whether or not his conjecture linking Winter's crippled leg with his bitter outlook is correct, his attempt to account for the ferocity of Winter's attacks on the system reveals a native shrewdness about people, so that the reader also begins to wonder about the basis of Winter's bitterness. Unfortunately the reader's interest in Winter is not sustained, and Joseph's reflections - suggestive though they are that Winter's Marxism is really an expression of a profound personal sense of injustice - remain untested and unconfirmed. Some of Joseph's words at the very end of the novel do suggest, however, that he has not dismissed Winter's political views on this basis. He tells Baruch that he has learnt a great deal from Winter - as well as from him, of course - and that Winter may be able to teach him a little more, after Baruch has gone (Chap.11, p.316).

Joseph's conjectures about Winter, though unconfirmed, are suggestive, and modify the reader's perception of him. Stead leaves judgements on the more important characters to the more authoritative voice of Baruch. Such is the authority of Baruch's voice, however, that when he delivers judgement

on the motives or real nature of another character, the reader can reasonably object that he is being told what to think of that character by the author, through Baruch. Stead favours the practice of having characters discuss one another in this novel, but when Baruch delivers his judgements on others, as he so often does, some of the dangers of having such a fully endorsed, un-distanced character in the novel reveal themselves. In the context of this study, however, Baruch's pronouncements on other characters are important, like Joseph's, because they create an interest in the reader in the relationship between characters and their ideologies.

When Catherine asks Baruch what he thinks of her friends the Folliots, who are heavily involved in the left-wing publication, the "International Worker", he gives force to the suspicions that are later aroused in the reader by Fulke's speech to the striking seamen : that he and his wife are dilettantes and lack a real understanding of the situation of the workers.

'I must say what I think,' said Baruch, 'they are romantics. They would be delighted to have a police-raid. Ever since their marriage they have had nothing but splendid adventures with the police and frontier-guards, and have always got off scot-free, of course. Fulke's father is a rich amateur collector of paintings. Marion's people are high up in the Government service in England. There are no romantic scuffles with a policeman in the life of the working-people. It riles me when I see Fulke get up before a body of bleak-faced, whiskered, half-starved men and get off his cheese-cake eloquence and well-bred witticisms.... But, Catherine, Fulke is weak. He will give up sooner or later to comfort or vanity, if no worse.'

(Chap.5, p.148)

Fulke's speech to the striking seamen - out of touch, as it is, with the harsh realities of their situation - provides support for Baruch's view of him. Stead later returns to this theme of the bourgeois couple amusing themselves with the idea of escape, in search of romance, in The Beauties and Furies, her second novel.

Baruch also gives Catherine an analysis of her own situation during this same visit, and advises her on her future course of action. This analysis is of more interest to the reader, as Catherine is a more important and more

puzzling character, and so the assistance given by the author through Baruch is more welcome. Catherine's situation appears to have similarities with that of the Folliots, but her search for a cause to fight for is motivated by a genuine passion rather than a decadent desire for excitement and romance. Baruch urges her to try to find a cause worthy of this passion of hers:

'Go abroad, if you can. See if you can join Saunderson's party to the Balkans. Get a real cause to fight about. What do I see on your red dress pinned there? The badge of the Kuo-min-tang? Do you know their function in young China? To impede the path of revolution, for example. But to you it is only another flamboyant cause by means of whose symbol you can irritate your folks at home and your vis-à-vis in the tramcar. Isn't it true that you sang with the Salvation Army several times to irritate some atheist friends, who pressed you too far? Catherine, what are you doing with yourself? The most glorious, and the bloodiest and most serious work is open to you, you who never had a home or work. You can be a martyr and for the sake of liberty; you can with your fire light some cold, shivering hearths.

(Chap.5, p.150)

He concludes with this advice:

'Then get something out of your lovers. I knew a girl who learned eight European languages perfectly from her eight lovers. But you won't; no. Otherwise you would have done it. Yet you should give your magnificent passion exercise, since it is your sole and jealous interest. It is your way of living : exacerbate existence!'

(Chap.5, p.152)

One of the ironies of the novel - perhaps an unintended one - is that Catherine chooses to "exercise her passion" by loving Baruch. He is so grossly insensitive to her feelings, however, that he leaves for America without a pang of remorse, although she has told him that her sanity cannot survive without his support, and has retreated, accordingly, to an asylum. That Baruch escapes without any authorial condemnation whatever indicates just how uncritical is the author's endorsement of him.

In contrast with Baruch, the relatively minor Marxist characters in the foregoing discussion are treated with a refreshing scepticism, particularly in relation to their

ideological commitments. In each case, it is at least suggested that this commitment is an expression of an impulse that has nothing to do with an interest in, or understanding of political or economic systems, but which is related to strictly psychological needs, be they profound or frivolous. Winter's commitment to Marxism emerges as the most total, solid and permanent. Whatever unspoken psychological need it is fulfilling, it has this solidity to recommend it. Catherine's political activity seems to be an expression of an impulse that is equally profound, but less stable. While Catherine's commitment is an unreliable but sincere one, that of the Folliots is nothing more than a pose, to be looked back on as "wild oats" in their comfortable middle age. While Catherine may make only a short-term contribution to "the cause", it is a positive contribution. People like the Folliots, however, Baruch and the novel as a whole suggest, can only harm the socialist movement by bringing its very seriousness of purpose into question.

Marxist ideology is in the ascendant in the world of the novel, as has been pointed out. Not only the Christian faith, but also the capitalist ethic and the system it supports are in a serious, perhaps terminal decline. Not surprisingly, the capitalist ideology lacks a committed, and effective spokesman in this novel. The most prominent practitioner of capitalist exploitation is Gregory Chamberlain, the proprietor of the Tank Steam Press, where both Joseph and Baruch work - without pay for much of the novel. Chamberlain, however, is an utterly incompetent capitalist and, after struggling from crisis to financial crisis, the printing works finally closes down late in the novel. Tom Withers, who also works at the press, and has a financial stake in the business, is a far more effective and committed spokesman for the capitalist ethic of "looking after oneself", as he reveals in a long speech in reply to Baruch.

'Aw, don't begin that,' said Withers bitterly. 'I'm not a social type, true. I don't give a damn about my fellow-workers. To begin with, I don't want to be like them, or live in a commonwealth with them, or vote with them, or argue with them about some idiotic politics or socialist theory. It gives me a pain in the neck. And I don't want them to worry about me. I like to be alone and I want to die alone; no comrades for me, thanks. And I'm not going to sign on with a lot of hot-headed fanatics who want to upset everything, out of jealousy, because their brains aren't good enough to get them on. Nothing but "the State"; the State should do everything, feed them, their women, their kids. I'm a man. I want to fight my own battles. But there's another reason: I'd better tell the truth or you'll be after me : I'm not so heroic; it's not that. I just don't want to fight, I just don't want to. I've had too much trouble.'

(Chap.7, p.193)

After conceding here that his views are really only an expression of political apathy, Withers later goes on to revise his position and to claim that he is in fact a good socialist, but primarily a pragmatist.

'I'm as good a Socialist as anyone, but I'm practical,' said Withers.
There was no reply.

'I'm a good Communist too, if it comes to that, but I use my eyes,' Withers finished irritably.

(Chap.7, p.195)

Many of the accusations that Withers makes against Baruch - in particular that he is betraying the working class by accepting a comfortable position in the United States - have more than an element of truth in them, but his credibility as a spokesman for any point of view is undermined by his profound uncertainty and confusion about his own ideological position. This confusion is well illustrated by the statements quoted above. Against a less formidable opponent than Baruch, Chamberlain in particular, Withers is much more successful, and much of the most successful dialogue in the novel takes place between these two. They often produce exchanges of such sustained vigour and dramatic interest that they can only be matched in the scope of this study by the exchanges between Jules Bertillon and Michel

Alphendéry in House of All Nations. Unfortunately, neither character is of central interest in the novel, so that these exchanges lack both the ideological and the dramatic interest of those in the later novel, and remain as promising, but isolated successes. There are many such successes in Seven Poor Men of Sydney.

Although frequent reference has been made to Baruch Mendelssohn in this discussion - to his special status as a portrait of William Blake, as the ideological centre of the novel, whose views are endorsed, whose actions are accepted uncritically - it would be helpful to subsequent discussion to bring these numerous references together and to try to establish a fuller and more useful image of him at this stage. It was mentioned in the introductory discussion that Baruch and Michael Baguenault are contrasting or opposing forces in the ideological turmoil through which "the hero of the novel", Joseph Bag^uenault, must make his way. Accordingly, discussion of Michael's outlook will follow this examination of that of Baruch.

It is appropriate at the outset of this discussion of Baruch to produce some evidence in support of the claim that he is, in terms of the author's relationship with him, a special character, presented almost without distancing irony. A couple of illustrative examples will suffice. When Baruch first appears in the novel, the author gives the reader clear warning that he is no ordinary "journeyman", and that he has extraordinary knowledge. The scene is the printing works.

He stopped the machine and put blotting-paper over the top of the pile. He knew these men backwards: he knew all their cues and their speeches, and he knew their condition. No journeyman's dreams were his.

(Chap.3, p.86)

Soon afterwards, in the lunch-hour, Baruch delivers a whole series of long speeches, elucidating various subjects for Joseph's benefit. It soon becomes clear that the author finds him an attractive figure.

Baruch had now gesticulated himself into a perfect good humour, had forgotten his sickness and empty stomach; he laughed lovingly at his audience, showing his white buck teeth.

(Chap.3, p.92)

When Joseph asks for help with his algebra, Baruch eagerly launches into this new subject, delighted to have such a willing audience, and to have an opportunity to use his best-loved gift - his intellect. The description of his

activity reveals his personal attractions, and the speech that follows reveals his intellectual attractions, particularly his complete faith in the ability of his reason to master any subject, or at least to render it intelligible.

But Baruch explained the problem for him, choosing his words simply, glancing up quickly through Joseph's glasses on which the sun shone brightly, to see if he understood the reasoning, patting his arm, threshing out fine seeds of thought from the golden harvest in his head, till his head presently overflowed again, and he sat chin-deep in a flood of exegesis which bewitched the pupil, his eyes, voice and body mobile with the love, wit and understanding of his nature.

'Grasp this and this, and you have invaded the whole question. More than that, you are on the road for the capital city, you can take the kingdom, you border on all that is known in science. Not so much is known, don't think it, that you can't make your way. The body of science is full of holes, ragged and clear - obscure like a moonlit ghost; but it is there, even if in the moonlight, even if a phantom of a shape that has been. If you make a stab at it, you'll find the stuff it's made of.'

(Chap.3, p.93; my emphasis)

Joseph is amazed by his intellectual audacity, and the reader can sense an authorial pressure on him to share Joseph's amazement and sense of wonder.

Joseph laughed. 'You put things in such a way, nothing is serious to you, but then you have the brains; nobody ever thought me smart. Everything is really hard for me.'

(Ibid.)

Perhaps the most powerful evidence to suggest that the author admires Baruch's faith in his reason and his ability to use it is the sheer bulk of his expositions that she includes in the novel. His first series of lunch-hour lectures, from which the passages above have been taken, occupies seven and a half pages, with occasional, brief, Socratic interjections from Joseph. Joseph's algebra problem and his assertion that "Everything is really hard for me" prompt Baruch to give another speech, over a page in length, largely concerned with the power of the arithmetical concepts of addition and subtraction to explain the world. Part of Baruch's purpose is to give Joseph more faith in his own

resources, to show him that his humility is crippling, and after all, only a state of mind. He concludes by coming to this point - "'Pray don't think mathematics is a mystery, Jo, it's the bunk that's obscure'" (Chap.3, p.95). This speech does, in fact, make an enormous impression on Joseph - "understanding gushed out and watered earth barren and virgin" in his mind (Ibid.).

The sheer size of this series of speeches by Baruch - and there are others of comparable size in the novel - strongly suggests that the author herself is interested in and entertained by them, and has assumed that the reader will share her enthusiasm. Of course these speeches are also characterizing to some extent, and have in this an ulterior purpose, but their great number and size can surely only be accounted for by an intense enjoyment of them for their own sake on the author's part. The fact that Joseph is so profoundly impressed by them on this occasion suggests, further, that the author regards them as not only interesting, but also as powerful, profound and convincing. While Joseph's relative naïveté and ignorance might seem to suggest that he would be easily convinced, they can also be seen as an indication that Baruch's arguments must have been of extraordinary power to have penetrated the darkness in his mind.

Baruch has many long speeches in the novel - most readers would find them excessive - but while this is strong evidence in support of the proposition that he is a special, endorsed and authoritative voice, perhaps the most conclusive evidence is to be found in the overall ideological structure of the novel, and in the career of Joseph as he makes his way through the "storm" of conflicting ideas. As is suggested by the incident just referred to - where Baruch's speech causes a radical change in Joseph's outlook - Baruch has a decisive influence on Joseph's development in the novel. It is appropriate, then, that the broad outlines of Baruch's intellectual and ideological position should be established at this point.

The extracts from Baruch's speeches already reproduced in this study suggest some of the basic assumptions of his

position. Perhaps the most fundamental of these is his faith in reason and his intellect. He is utterly committed to a rational understanding of the world, and, predictably, he rejects religion. His rationalism gives rise to an irrepressible optimism, as he believes that man can solve all his problems through the use of reason. He also has a profound - if more abstract than practical - compassion for human suffering, and this is the basis of his preference for a Marxist approach to political and economic issues. Living in Woolloomooloo, he is surrounded by poverty and suffering, but he has chosen to expose himself to these things so that he will never forget them and so lose the basis of his Marxist commitment.

He was so wretched to see these people swarming around him, with all these evils added to their burden of poverty that he often fell into a fever, and this idea was with him, day and night, that he was obliged to relieve them in some way. But he hardly knew in what way. He lived by choice among the sordid southern lives of the native and immigrant poor to get himself impregnated with this fever so that it would never leave him.

(Chap.5, p.140)

The "evils added to their burden of poverty" are their false hopes and beliefs, prominent among these being the Christian religion. The quality of Baruch's commitment to the cause of the poor and oppressed is impugned by both Withers and, of all people, Fulke Folliot. Both point to his acceptance of a well-paid position in the United States as a betrayal of this cause. Baruch's defence - convincing only to himself perhaps, but consistent with his role as intellectual - is that an insight into the workings of capitalism is essential to those who want to destroy it (Chap.10, p.285). If some doubts remain about Baruch's commitment to this cause, the broad outlines of his position are patently clear; he stands for reason, order, sanity and hope, and is an enemy of irrationality, mystery, and despair. For the sake of brevity, this discussion will use the phrase "forces of Light" - a phrase that seems consistent with Baruch's and the novel's view of the world - to characterize the cluster of principles that Baruch supports and represents.

Michael Baguenault, as has been mentioned, is in many ways Baruch's opposite, and represents in broad terms the forces opposed to Baruch - which will, accordingly, be referred to as the "forces of Darkness". Of course these forces are only "dark" from a rationalist, optimistic viewpoint, and while Michael seems to have been conceived as a sort of negative of Baruch (a metaphor that Michael himself uses), and so is to a large extent determined by him, Stead has so successfully entered into the character of Michael that he emerges as the most powerful and memorable figure in the novel, and probably its greatest imaginative achievement.

The fundamental difference between Michael and Baruch is a profound one : while Baruch gains his understanding of the world through the use of reason, Michael's understanding of the world comes in moments of vision when ordinary perception is heightened or transcended. In short, Baruch is a rationalist, Michael a mystic. Baruch seeks to understand the world, Michael is concerned with experiencing it; Baruch loves order, but to Michael order is at best factitious, at worst a lie. One of the most arresting statements of this fundamental difference between the two is contained in an outburst from Michael in protest against self-righteous condemnation of the "scabs" manning a ship during the seamen's stike. Baruch does not express his contempt for them, as it happens, but Michael's sudden and unexpected anti-ideological outburst inevitably reflects on Baruch as the most powerful proponent of the value of reason and ideas.

'I'd like to join them,' said a dull voice, 'to see what it is like to join a lost ship, to be with the lowest of the low. It would be strange company. Can you imagine them eating together, sleeping together? The berths below teeming with lice, the food stinking in this weather, rations of rum served out to keep 'em happy till they clear the Heads, and in the back of their heads the idea that when they get paid they're going to clear out at the next port; no responsibilities and absolutely not wanted here; exiles. I wouldn't mind it at that. You know, I'm not too sensitive to moral issues, when I've seen what I've seen. And then it must be a relief to be with a lot of perverse dummies, whose backs aren't always bristling with righteousness.'

(Chap.7, p.198)

Michael's desire "'to see what it is like'", to explore the whole range of human experience, regardless of the moral or ideological implications of doing so, is surely his most profound impulse; as he says in another powerful speech referred to earlier: "'I am thinking in terms of reality, the only ones I know. I suffer;...'" (Chap.1, p.31). "'Reality'", or immediate experience comes before everything else; it is the only truth, to Michael. This urge of Michael's, allied with his hyper-sensitive and emotionally unstable personality, has some very profound implications, and Michael later comes to live these out; in Chapter 8, when a "storm" explodes in his mind, he relives his horrifying wartime experiences, and later takes his urge "'to see what it is like'" to its logical conclusion by throwing himself over the Gap at Fisherman's Bay. Insanity, despair and death come, then, to be associated with him.

Of course Michael also embodies some more positive and attractive qualities. The many mystical and surreal experiences that he has very early in the novel are among the most memorable passages of the novel as a whole, both in terms of imaginative effort and of quality of writing. One of the best of these visionary experiences, in which the violent forces of life suddenly reveal themselves to him, comes after he has been "at death's door", as his father puts it, with diphtheria.

When he looked over the edge of the woven rattan at the garden, everything was more lively than a moment before. The dusty leaves blazed, the grass reared itself with a pugnacious thrust, the plants were marshalled, the snail crawled over the leaf with a rushing voluptuous impulse, and all animal and vegetable creations were aware of the sun, wind, sky, shadow, and of their neighbours and of the footfalls and shadows of men, through prehensile senses Dehiscent seeds burst, pods split, sheaths flew back, grass sprouted, ants scurried, the sun leaped, the sky vibrated, sap hissed, the eucalypt at the foot of the path arched its foolish light head, and the cicadas shouted to turn one's brain.... He felt dimly that he had in his bosom, if he could only force it out, the secret of greatness; that if he could always be as he had been that moment, his mere word would sway vast crowds of men.

(Chap.1, pp.10-11)

The reader is surely inclined to agree that he has, in his moment of vision, some sort of "greatness", beside which the rationalism of Baruch, however brilliant, seems mundane, and inevitably reductive of experience.

An important aspect of Michael's personality that has not been mentioned, and which plays an important part in many of his surreal experiences, is his powerful passion for certain women - for Mae Graham, in the early parts of the novel. The incident in which she runs into him, outside her art class, in the strange half-light of the Haymarket Building, is particularly memorable. The realization dawns on him, after his shock has subsided, that the pain that has tortured him for months has been, in fact, his unrequited passion for her, operating on a sub-conscious, physical level-

... the vermicular pain which had been in his head and bowels for so many months and even years past became a pang. He struck his head with his open hand, and uttered a groaning, crying sound. Fearing to be found there he went downstairs, tripping and sliding over the old matting. When he got to the bottom, he looked up, but saw no one looking after him. He looked upward into the unlighted dome which hovered above in the roof of the building at a considerable height, saw the dark open doorway into the studio and the still expectant light lying on wall, banister, and stair; nothing moved. He said: 'Awakened! I am that. - O God, help me: I have been thinking of her for months.'

(Chap.2, p.44)

("Awakened" is the title of a painting - a nude, perhaps of Mae herself - that he sees when he is still reeling from the psychological shock of colliding with Mae on the staircase). The surreal quality of this whole incident is superbly sustained, and, as with so many of Michael's heightened experiences, it forms one of the most memorable and promising passages of the novel. Michael's passion is clearly a force of Darkness, and this is confirmed in a powerful speech of Kol Blount's. Kol is a close ally of Michael's in the ideological conflict that takes place in the novel. This speech is the most evocative description of one of these powerful anarchic forces - passionate love.

'But a strong passion moves in chaos and associates with death, its foot goes among hermits and ravens. Love, love passing through many frightful experiences, retchings and convulsions, draws sustenance from them; they only show it the measure of its fortitude. Even so its skin is dyed with the mess it feeds on, but it lives. From the fierceness of its discontent it craves all violences, pains and perversions, and feeds on its disappointments. It shuns joy, sympathy, good; it will rifle, plunder, kill, and always arise purer and more triumphant, and more truly love. It desires to do evil, to crush opponents to death, to stifle critics, to drive the breath from rivals, to cleave the world asunder and let the smoke out that curls in its entrails. Venus should be black; that is the colour of love, the rite of the night.'

(Chap.2, p.61-62)

As this speech of Kol's demonstrates, Michael is not the only spokesman for the forces of Darkness in the novel; indeed his position as ^bem_Aodiment of them is sometimes seriously compromised - most seriously in his Baruchian rationalistic attacks on the Church in Chapter 1. However, in broad outline Michael is a powerful projection of the forces opposed to Baruch's rationalistic optimism; as he says late in the novel in another powerful passage, "'darkness is the condition of man, and light is all he thirsts after'" (Chap.9, p.273). He inhabits and represents the realm of mystery, unreason, passion, chaos, insanity, despair and death.

If, as this study proposes, the opposition between the figures of Baruch and Michael is the most fundamental conflict of outlooks in the novel, then Stead's use in the "Endpiece" of the metaphor of the storm, the archetypal metaphor for the battle between order and chaos, is an apt way of summing up the action of the novel. This discussion must now turn its attention to "the hero of the novel", Joseph Baguenault, and the path he takes in passing through this "storm".

Barnard Eldershaw observed of the characters in Stead's early books that "no one develops beyond their initial statements"¹ and this is largely true of the characters in Seven Poor Men that have been discussed up to this point. She also observes in the same discussion - anticipating Dorothy Green's comments quoted earlier - that "one feels that the author is more interested in ideas than in people, and in cosmic shapes than in either" (my emphasis).² On reflection "cosmic shapes" seems a very appropriate term for Baruch and Michael, far more appropriate than "characters". It is the intention of this study, however, to argue that this is much less than a complete account of Seven Poor Men, that there is one character - Joseph - in whom Stead is intensely interested, that this interest is at least equal to her obvious interest in ideas, that this character - accurately so termed - does in fact develop, and that his development is one of the novel's major centres of interest. As was pointed out very early in this discussion, there are two very compelling reasons for taking a closer look at Joseph Baguenault, who, on a first reading of the novel at least, tends to be overshadowed by the superhuman figures - or "cosmic shapes" - of Baruch and Michael. The first of these is the addition of an "Endpiece" to the main body of the novel, whose purpose is to encapsulate the action of the novel in a metaphoric, poetic way and in so doing, to interpret and clarify that action at the same time. At a first reading, the "Endpiece" appears to shift the emphasis of the novel somewhat, away from the more flamboyant or articulate characters and on to the ordinary man, Joseph, by emphasizing the value of sheer survival, and of the calm and security that Joseph so ably represents. The second of these reasons, Stead's own comment on the novel, gives support to this interpretation of the "Endpiece". Of Joseph she has said,

1. Barnard Eldershaw, Essays in Australian Fiction, (Melbourne : Melbourne University Press, 1938), p.167.

2. Ibid., p.168.

"he was the one I felt most deeply about, the man who had no beliefs, no position, no hope, but kept on bravely. He's the real hero of the book".¹ This discussion will attempt to establish that an attentive reading of the novel reveals that Joseph and his development are among the novel's main concerns, and that, consequently, the "Endpiece" does not represent a shift of emphasis, but rather a final clinching emphasis on one of the novel's main centres of interest.

This discussion will follow the course of Joseph's development in the novel by examining selected passages that either establish his state of mind at a particular point or describe actual points of crisis in his development. Perhaps it is appropriate to begin such a discussion by referring to a passage that describes Joseph's initial condition in the novel, as an archetypal "poor man" whose outer shabbiness is a fitting metaphor for his inner state of abject humility and hopelessness.

He looked at himself between his hands. The sole of one boot was attached by a hairpin, the worn knees of his trousers showed the colour of his pale skin when he sat down. His hat was an old one of his cousins. The rest of his attire fell in with these items and produced a sort of harmonious costume, the uniform of misery. The children of Fisherman's Bay shouted after him, 'Joey, Jo, Jo, Ullo Jo,' when he went past in the evenings. He knew what this song meant; it meant, 'You are rubbish thrown out by men, and we are allowed to play with you, no one even has a salvage interest in you.' The Clown of the Universe had produced a man in his image. The accumulated misery, shame, hunger and ignorance of centuries straddled the path as he advanced against the evening sun, and they shrieked with laughter to see his hat getting taller in the new lamplight and his coat more uncouth as his shadow fell backwards towards them. He was a stranger. It was marked in his face, which, of a dingy pallor, by some effect of skin or reflection appeared with the masterly distinction of an etched face, it was grotesque but more real, more human than the high-nosed, red-skinned, clapper-voiced, mussel-mouthed faces around him. It shone by the quality of its pain, incongruity and isolation.

(Chap.3, p.96)

1. Interview in A.L.S., 241.

At this point, Joseph is much like the mass of poor people that Baruch sees around him, who have "all kinds of miseries more than physical", who are weighed down unnecessarily by various delusions - "evils added to their burden of poverty" - especially the Christian faith (Chap.5, p.140). Joseph's development in the novel is a throwing-off of this additional and unnecessary "burden". It is also a vindication of Baruch's analysis of the miseries of the poor, which suggests that it is this additional "burden" of non-physical miseries that is the most crippling. To relate this to the passage above, then, it is significant that the children continue to jeer at Joseph throughout much of the novel, but that when he achieves a healthy degree of self-respect towards the end of the novel - through his success in relating to a woman - he becomes impervious to their sadistic jibes (Chap.9, pp.251-2). This patterning provides a neat vindication of Baruch's analysis that can hardly be inadvertent on the author's part. In fact Joseph himself makes the same discovery as Baruch about the nature of poverty when he reflects, while window-shopping, that a completely new set of clothes would not conceal his inner poverty from the searching gaze of these children - "they would only laugh again to see him trying to conceal himself" (Chap.4, p.118). The same point is made, but with less contrivance, by this second, related touch.

In keeping with Baruch's analysis, the novel shows that Joseph's Christian faith is the root cause of much of his inner, as opposed to physical, poverty, despite the fact that the rituals of the Church are profoundly enjoyable experiences for him early in the novel. "Enjoyable" is not misplaced in this context, because, as the following passage suggests, these experiences are, despite his "love" of them, crippling Joseph's intellectual development.

He loved the Sunday masses, the respectable smiling people, the bustle of their clothes, the priest in his vestments and the repetition of the ritual that he knew so well. The ritual allowed its participants to enjoy the exaltation of inspiration, although they had none, as each phrase moved to its oft-rehearsed conclusion and the sacred words were born living on their lips. They were a second transubstantiation, the word becoming spirit. Different from his mother,

who muttered her own prayers and complaints, he went through the service like a celebrant. Each moment of the mass perfectly absorbed the small amount of mental energy the quiet allowed him, and the end left him peaceful, quiescent, in a state of grace. The confessional purified him and made it possible for him to live without thinking at all.

(Chap.3, pp.81-82)

It would be entirely appropriate to a visionary like Michael "to live without thinking at all", but Joseph has the impulse to think about his situation, and when he does so he is appalled by his own ignorance, and yearns for escape from his dreary and hopeless situation. He ends a fantasy of escape with a sad but realistic assessment of his position:

There are hundreds of kinds of printing-works - no industry in the world is so varied. Is it possible that he will stick for ever in one wretched place, where he learns nothing and is maltreated?

(Chap.3, p.83)

Despite Joseph's Christian faith, which allows him to live without thinking at all for a time, he cannot help thinking, and feeling dissatisfied with his situation in life. It is this dissatisfaction that makes him receptive to the persuasions of Baruch and Winter. The best example of Joseph's dismal reflections on the hopelessness of his situation comes after his first major encounter with the potent influence of Baruch's rationalism. Joseph already sees his faith as an impediment to his freedom, and his attempt to use it as a consolation fails utterly.

Joseph shambled shabbily on. How far was he from the bottom of the ladder? He was a long way from the top. All that was true, with the professions organised and education so expensive, with a family depending on you, and no money even for a decent shave, what chance had he? Look at the way the fellows jabbered. He didn't even know what they were talking about, and supposedly they were both using the same language. Yes, with the world organised into water-tight compartments what chance had a dunce like him? A man needed influence to get on, influence and money; even those young lawyers said so. A man such as he was would spend all his fertile years scraping together a little sum to pay the mortgage on his

father's house or to save up for a wife. After that, nothing; he was done for: only the dreary round of anxieties and every new acquaintance a new responsibility. He did not see how he would ever afford to have a wife and child, for example. Courage, said his conscience faintly, a good heart, cheerfulness, hard work, trust in the Lord.

'O Lord, sweet well of all blessings, who know and see yourself my needs' - does he? is it possible? 'God is a pure spirit, because he has no body and he cannot be seen by our eyes, nor touched by our hands. God,' said Joseph to himself, with the sun beating down on his head, 'is above all that: a funny relation, a pure spirit and a dunce. I wish I did not believe in religion, I would feel more insignificant, I would be freer.'

(Chap.4, pp.112-13)

While Joseph dwells on the material aspects of his poverty here, his acute awareness of his own ignorance - his feeling that educated people "talk a different language" that he cannot understand - reappears time and again in the course of the novel, and it is his thirst for knowledge, for an education, that leads him to Baruch, and becomes the basis of their pupil-teacher relationship. This passage also illustrates a balance point in Joseph's development; his religious faith is crumbling but his faith in reason and education is growing stronger. This double process continues through the novel until he finally renounces his religious faith towards the end of it, after Michael's suicide.

As the passage above illustrates, the weakening of Joseph's religious faith is a gradual, insidious process. The growth of his faith in reason, however, is far more dramatic, with a number of points of crisis and of sudden enlightenment, the descriptions of which are among the author's greatest successes in the presentation of Joseph, and indeed in the novel as a whole. Two of these points of crisis are of special importance, representing as they do the initial dawning of reason in Joseph's mind and, later, the conquest of the light of reason over the darkness and chaos of his mind. In both of these passages Stead has chosen, with considerable psychological insight, to relate Joseph's new faith in reason and order to his old Christian faith.

The first of these passages comes at the end of Baruch's first series of lunch-time lectures, to which this discussion has already referred. The last of these, prompted by Joseph's request for help with his algebra, is an attempt to show that mathematics is not a mystery, but is clear and orderly, with a remarkable power to render the world intelligible. Baruch's final words are included, as they are essential to an understanding of Joseph's subsequent reaction, as he struggles with, and triumphs over his mathematics exercises.

'Pray don't think mathematics is a mystery, Jo, it's the bunk that's obscure.'

Joseph, surprised, gay, much agitated by the oddities of the young man, stubbornly fought out each problem, confusing and disentangling in turn mathematical conventions, stumbling over the conjugation of an exact idea of multiplicity with an unknown, mystified, but suddenly breaking open the rock so that understanding gushed out and watered earth barren and virgin. For a moment his eyes were opened, a pure stream broke through into the light, a new diagenetic principle began to work and he became aware of science, dimly, palely, because the light passed still through the clerestories of superstition; but it was as a ray of sunlight he had once seen crash through a memorial window in the village church, when he had wandered there with Michael, as a little boy, showing up a middle-aged mystery and the rusty black of devout kneeling women, a light even to the blind.

(Chap.3, p.95)

Clearly the terms in which much of Joseph's experience is presented - "a ray of sunlight", "the clerestories of superstition", "earth barren and virgin" - are those that Baruch himself might employ; the reference to Joseph's religious experience, however, surely represents an attempt by the author to enter into his experience, and render it in his terms. Michael's presence in these recollections is hardly gratuitous, but its significance is not clear at this point.

The second of these passages, more extended and more important than the first, reveals Joseph's response to another lecture - not from Baruch this time, but from a Professor Mueller in the Physics Lecture Theatre at the University. The significance of the setting is clear :

Joseph has yearned for education for so long, has felt that the university students at Communist Hall "spoke another language", has been in awe of the University itself which he thinks of "as a kind of holy place, holy and exciting" (Chap.6, p.164), and now, albeit at Baruch's insistence, he has heard a lecture from a "high priest" of learning, in the "Church of reason" itself (to borrow Pirsig's apposite phrase). These parallels with his religious experience are not lost on Joseph - or on the author - and once again his experience of revelation is presented through some of the most powerful images from his Christian background. Here, however, they are juxtaposed with images from his new vision of order, which is based not on the Ten Commandments, but on the laws of physical science.

Joseph perceived through a great door in his mind's eye, a sort of internal cathedral, in which the five senses were as five ogival windows; it was the slow and stable architecture of the universe, in which all was perceptible, computable. His heart throbbed: 'All can be seen, discovered: it is not chaos.' He saw a vivid unfolding in thousands of series, spathes unfolding into innumerable buds, cubes developing infinitesimally, groined arches ricocheting infinitely, leaping higher and higher, and the incommensurable perspective of mountainous universes building without builders. He saw thousands of concentric cubes, kingdoms of crystals ascending from needle-tufts to Dolomites, hierarchies and hosts of peaks like the hosts of the empyrean, orderly dissolutions and reformations, like armies in battle, polarisations, crystals in deposition like forests of leaves, chemical affinities resembling human love, the universe in the electron resembling the solar system. The universe seemed more perfect and orderly than it did to the lecturer. He breathed quietly and joyfully, the world fell into order and the furniture of his mind moved mysteriously into the proper places - like the marshalled benches of a classroom, like the austere reading-desk of the lecturer. At the demonstration of the inflexibility of the physical order, he felt more a man, freer.

(Chap.6, pp.185-6)

The conclusion of the passage will follow, but it is appropriate to interrupt it here, as Joseph's attention turns to Baruch at this point and he sees in him "the symbol of free thought without regulation, of dispute, confusion ...". This seems paradoxical at first reading and remains difficult after

several. Until now Baruch has represented reason and order to Joseph, but apparently, in this moment of profound illumination, he has been momentarily transported to a world of perfect order, so that Baruch's mind seems chaotic by comparison. Short-lived though this transcendence of Baruch's reason and order may be, it is clear that his relations with Baruch have entered a new phase as a result of this experience; Joseph no longer depends on him for his sense of order, as he has his own personal vision of order, and, like Michael, he trusts his own experience - and especially such moments of vision - before all else.

He turned again - Baruch's dark hair and white thick-skinned profile leaning on his hand, looking melancholy downwards, the symbol of free thought without regulation, of dispute, confusion, sophistry, of man's untold aberration, anarchy, waste, disappointment, whose relation to him was as a chemical affinity, but dimmer than the relation of the atoms, and troublous, round whose radiant attraction his little dark world had for a time swung out, this strange profile impinged on his demonstration-world, spoiled his gaiety. Darkly, with ~~the~~^a pang, the bottom fell out of his jerry-built heart.

(Chap.6, p.186)

It should be recalled that by this time Joseph is aware of Baruch's intention to take up a position in the United States, so that independence of mind is a desirable objective for him. While the conclusion of the passage remains somewhat confusing, its general purpose is surely to indicate that Joseph has grown out of his heavy reliance on Baruch for intellectual support and guidance. Perhaps the confusion is inevitable, as Joseph's feelings at this moment are very much at odds with one another; at the same moment he is filled with joy, because he has finally achieved a vision that combines the best of Baruch's and his own perception, and with grief, firstly because he realizes how imperfect human beings are by contrast with his vision of perfection, and secondly because the loss of Baruch suddenly seems real to him and the pain of losing him begins. It is not really surprising, then, that "the bottom fell out of his jerry-built heart".

Up to this point the discussion has dealt mainly with the growth of Joseph's faith in reason, initiated and fostered as it is by Baruch. The influence of Michael on Joseph's

development has scarcely been mentioned. If Michael and Baruch are regarded as the opposite poles between which Joseph moves, then clearly he has moved away from Michael and towards Baruch up to this point. Joseph shares certain instincts with Michael, however, that prevent him from ever completely embracing the rationalism of Baruch. In broad terms they share an unshakeable trust in their own experience, a scepticism about the ability of ideas and theories to change their world for the better, and a refusal to allow ideas or theories to distort or falsify their understanding of their own experience; in short, they are both essentially empiricists. The incident in which Michael's desire "to see what it is like" on the "scab ship" leads to a rejection of the self-righteousness of the ideologues around him is not matched by any incident involving Joseph. However, in his relationship with both Baruch and Winter, Joseph is sometimes forced to reject their pronouncements as unrealistic, or not true to his experience; he even describes Baruch's attempts to rationalize his way out of a difficulty as "'blarney'" on one occasion (Chap.7, p.189). Significantly, it is this instinct that leads Joseph to his final rejection of the Church, as a result of Michael's suicide. His faith, already moribund, cannot withstand the strains that are placed upon it at this point. He cannot endorse, and indeed rejects the Church's condemnation of Michael's suicide, knowing as he does the extent of misery and suffering in the lives of poor people like Michael and himself. Sitting in the church at a special mass for Michael, Joseph finally rejects as inadequate and indeed inhuman the Church's analysis of men's lives.

Joseph looked at his mother; the black satin ribbon on her hat rose towards the priest. Black satin ribbon, you do what you're told; you're a good Catholic, but you don't know men's hearts. But Michael would have difficulty in lifting up his heart: it is dissolving, running away in brine and blood. Joseph's mother turned a briny blue glance upon him, and her black cotton-gloved hand fumbled for his sleeve....

'Lead us not into temptation,'

'But deliver us from evil'

The sun shone in the transept, and a visitor, with lifted head, perambulated slowly round the chapels, his soft footstep making a vagrant comment on the Mass. Outside the grass flicked silver.

That has nothing to do with it: I've never had temptation in my life and never done evil, said Joseph, but I'm poor and unhappy, and might as well as Michael jump off the rock. I'd sink in the sea, the end of me; who would care? I would just be dead like a dead seagull.

(Chap.9, p.256)

The reader is reminded by Joseph's "'you don't know men's hearts'" of Michael's powerful attack, quoted earlier, on the inadequacy of the Christian faith in coming to terms with the pointless, undeserved suffering in people's lives. Joseph refuses his mother's request that he serve at another mass for Michael, pointing out that Michael himself "'would have thought it was foolery'". He is pressed by his mother into voicing his fundamental objection to the Church's attitude, which is the basis, apparently, for his resolve never to attend another mass: "'who can say Michael was wrong?'" (Chap.9, p.257). This response of Joseph's has clear similarities with that of Michael in rejecting the condemnation of the "scabs"; both uphold the right of the individual to make his own decisions by his own lights, and reject dogmatic judgements on them. Joseph is conscious, then, of the limits to the usefulness of theories and ideals, and the outlook that he expresses at the end of the novel, when he "'knows where he stands'", reflects this awareness (Chap.11, p.316).

Before examining Joseph's outlook at the end of the novel, this discussion must give some attention to a factor that becomes increasingly important to Joseph's development in the latter parts of the novel - the love of a woman. Some reference was made earlier to the fact that Jo no longer noticed the jeering of the children when the attentions of a girl had bolstered his self-respect. At first he is astonished that this girl should like him -

Joseph walked round the beach-path in profound astonishment: she was a nice girl and she liked him. He hardly noticed the beach children jumping in front of the shop saying, 'Oo-hoo, Joey's got a girl!'

(Chap.9, pp.251-2)

This represents an important step forward for Joseph; Baruch has taught him to have more intellectual self-respect, of course, but here he has achieved a personal self-respect

that renders the jeering of the children quite harmless. In the final stages of the novel Joseph continues to succeed in his relations with the girl, and takes to walking around Fisherman's Bay with her. In describing one such walk, Stead touches a poignant note that indicates just how much affection she has for Joseph. Flushed with his success with the girl, Joseph suddenly discovers - with a little help from her, perhaps - that suburban domesticity has considerable attractions.

They walked up and down the paths and Joseph realized for the first time how attractive the small front gardens were with their cement paths and standard roses.

(Chap.10, p.297)

Notwithstanding the delightful lightness of touch here, this also represents a step forward in self-knowledge on Joseph's part. He has come to realize that escape is not possible for him. Baruch and Michael - and Catherine, in her way - escape, but he has realized that he is not like them. Love, such as Jo felt for Baruch and presumably will feel for his wife, but not the passion of Michael, is now important to him; so are peace, calm and security. Jo becomes acutely aware of his attachment to such values when he visits Catherine in the asylum. Again he is presented in a humorous, but affectionate way.

'They are all throwing fits and I am calm, a dummy, but calm.' He smiled quietly to himself.

(Chap.11, p.304)

Joseph states his outlook at the very end of the novel, just before Baruch leaves for America. Having credited Baruch and Winter with helping him to discover "'where he stands'", he proceeds to define himself by negatives, endorsing, in the process, some of the observations that have just been made about him.

'Through listening to you and Winter I know where I stand.'

'You have found that out. Is it worthwhile, knowing?'

'Yes, I'm not a missionary like Winter, nor an intellectual like you, understanding every step I make. That must be queer, though, to know what you are doing. I'm not selfish and scheming like Withers, and not a straw in the wind like Michael. I don't get into dramas and excitement like everybody else.'

(Chap.11, p.315)

When Baruch asks him "'What are you, Joseph?'" he reveals, in the unusually long statement that follows, that he has arrived at a mature acceptance of his situation, not a passive, unthinking acceptance such as he had at the beginning of the novel, but one that is voluntary, and based on an understanding not only of the evils of the world, but also of his own limitations and of the limitations of ideologies and political action.

'This is how I think of it. I'm a letter of ordinary script. Events are printed with me face downwards. I will be thrown away when I am used up and there will be an "I" the less. No one will know. The presses will go on printing; plenty more have been made to replace me. History is at a standstill with me. That is what I am. I see my life, after all; I know what I am doing, too, in my way. Even you and Winter don't see yours as I see mine. But I realize everything is against me, as my smallness and oddness show. There are - as they say in the Bible - hierarchies and hierarchies over me economically and intellectually, and I shall never rise against them. I know now as much as I can ever know, and that's due to you and Winter. Perhaps Winter can still teach me a little; but it's slow. Every single power there is has over me a - sovereignty, jurisdiction and dominion - that was something you said the other day. "Do machines have children?" that sentimental fellow Milt Dean said one day when I was at Blount's. I am a machine. I am the end of my race.'

(Chap.11, p.316)

His view of the world is, of course, a rather fatalistic and quietistic one, and it is perhaps surprising that Stead should emphasize the value of sheer survival as strongly as she does in this novel, through Joseph. Of course, Joseph's preference for suburban security and conformity must be placed against the larger context of the novel as a whole, and this is surely one of the functions served by the "Endpiece". As to Joseph's final words here, various attempts have been made to read some "message" into them, but all such attempts have been repudiated by the author.¹ Perhaps it is valid, however, to link these words to the ideological changes that are depicted in the novel. The Christian faith is shown to be giving way to Marxist ideology in the novel, and while Joseph goes so far

1. Interview in A.L.S., 241

as to reject the Christian faith, he is unable or unwilling to embrace wholeheartedly the new - but perhaps equally unsatisfactory - ideology of Marxism. If these factors are linked with his words, then their implication is that a new "'race'", living by a new, perhaps Marxist creed, will take the place of the dying Christian "'race'". Above all these words are an expression of Joseph's lingering humility. Of course, the reader would be shocked if Joseph began boasting about his progress in the novel; nevertheless he emerges from the novel as perhaps its most admirable character. He survives, but his integrity, far from being sacrificed in the process, is enhanced immeasurably .

The "Endpiece" encapsulates the action of the novel through a poetic use of metaphor. If it is accepted that Joseph's career in the novel is of central importance - and the present study has perhaps gone some way towards establishing this - then the "Endpiece" does not represent an attempt to change the emphasis of the novel retrospectively; rather it places the tumultuous period that the novel depicts within the larger context of Joseph's life as a whole. Looking back on that period from the calm and security of middle-age, Joseph can seriously ask "'Why were we so shaken then?'" , and suggest a tentative answer in the form of another question "'Was it because we were young?'" (p.318). Clearly calm and security have taken the place of the turmoil of those years, in Joseph's life at least; but the implication is, surely, that young people in all periods go through a stage of profound psychological upheaval. Of course, Joseph's youth was spent in a time of generalized economic and ideological upheaval, and it is appropriate that the author should leave this question unanswered, as there are many imponderables involved, and as, in the final analysis, it is unanswerable.

There are some puzzling images in the "Endpiece", particularly the complex and extended image of "the mesh ... woven of the bodies of flying men and women" (p.317). This is a difficult image to account for satisfactorily as it is complex and changes constantly. Perhaps the most satisfactory general interpretation of the passages in which it occurs is that offered by Tony Thomas. He suggests that "the mesh of

flying beings is Stead's image for the paradisaal state for which man strives", and sees significance in the fact that Joseph walks between this web, which is above him, and the sea - a potent symbol in the novel - which is of course below him. In his conclusion Thomas gives a convincing interpretation of the general symbolism of these passages:

... he [Joseph] is remote from both the darkness of the supernatural world and from the ecstatic web above; he travels between them.¹

("The darkness of the supernatural world" is, in Thomas's view, symbolized by the sea, which is, of course, beneath Joseph). This interpretation fits well into the overall interpretation of the novel that this study has suggested, with Joseph following a path between two powerful and opposite forces or tendencies in man : on the one hand the quest for the ideal, for order and perfection, represented in the novel by Baruch, and on the other, the quest for escape into oblivion through mysticism or death, represented by Michael. While these opposing forces are profoundly irreconcilable, Joseph is able to achieve some sort of reconciliation or compromise between them within himself. Perhaps the best indication of this is Joseph's visionary experience in the lecture theatre, in which the mysticism that he shares with Michael is combined in a quite startling way with the love of order that he has learnt from Baruch (Chap.6, pp.185-6). This remarkable passage is in many ways the climax of the ideological drama that runs through the novel.

1. Tony Thomas, "Christina Stead", Westerly, 4 (December 1970), 52.

When one looks at Seven Poor Men of Sydney in the context of Stead's work as a whole, one cannot help being impressed, on the one hand, by its extraordinarily uneven quality, its almost fatal diversity of techniques and its relative lack of sustained effects; and, on the other hand, by the sheer brilliance of some of its writing and the remarkable extent to which the best of Stead's later work is anticipated in it. From the point of view adopted by the present study, with its emphasis on the presentation of ideology and character, the novel is, predictably perhaps, successful in some disparate and unexpected ways. The major cause of the weaknesses in the novel's treatment of ideologies is that the presence of Baruch and his prototype is ideologically overwhelming. Some of the problems that this gives rise to have already been discussed, but its most damaging large-scale effects have yet to be considered.

The first of these major large-scale failings relates to the novel's presentation of the Christian religion. This is filled with lapses of taste and of artistic control: Michael's and Baruch's arrogantly rationalistic denunciations of the Church, and the authorial hostility towards those fatally easy targets, ignorant domesticated women, are the most conspicuous of these. If the reader is not alienated, at an intellectual or ideological level, by the youthful boldness of many of the un-distanced attacks on the Christian religion, he is surely offended on an aesthetic level by the lapses of proper distancing and control that are often entailed by them. Of course, not all of the novel's attacks on the Christian faith are offensive in these ways. Michael's powerful attack on its inability to account for people's suffering, whatever its logical weaknesses, is profoundly characteristic of him, and therefore dramatically unimpeachable (Chap.1, p.31). An earlier incident, in which Michael adopts a crudely rationalistic approach in his attacks on the Church is, however, contrived, and its humour is in bad taste; the speeches themselves, as well as being offensive in the ways suggested above, are dramatically disastrous as they are profoundly inconsistent with Michael's larger dramatic shape. To blame Baruch and his prototype for such lapses may seem

far-fetched, but it should be recalled that the career of Joseph - the author's main centre of sympathetic interest - constitutes a rather neat demonstration of the truth of Baruch's view of religion among the poor. Joseph is freer and has more dignity at the end of the novel precisely because he has thrown off the unnecessary "burden" of Christian faith, and has replaced it with a faith in reason. Baruch's analysis is endorsed then by the novel as a whole, and it surely underpins the novel's overall anti-religious stance, as well as the individual un-distanced attacks such as those made through Michael in this particular incident.

The too-potent presence of the ideas of Baruch and his prototype also de~~s~~tracts from the intellectual respectability and dramatic effectiveness of the novel's presentation of Marxist ideology. The damaging dramatic weakness here is in the gross inconsistencies in the presentation of Marxist characters. To put it simply, the motives and the sincerity of the minor characters in adopting a Marxist position are very much open to question, but Baruch's motives and the sincerity of his commitment are above question. The reader may well wonder why Baruch is not treated with the same contempt as the Folliots are; after all, he deserts his friends and, apparently, the cause of the working class, by taking up a well-paid position in the United States which has been arranged for him by his uncle. Amazingly, Stead has expressed astonishment that anyone should interpret Baruch's departure as a betrayal of his commitment to Marxism;¹ certainly the novel passes no comment on it. To sum up, the figure of Baruch, which is of course of central importance to the novel's presentation of both Marxism and "the light of reason", is presented without the scepticism that is applied to the minor ideologues of the novel. Not only does the author fail to question the personal sincerity and conviction behind Baruch's ideological pronouncements,

1. Interview in A.L.S., 241.

but she also fails to submit the arguments themselves to intellectual scrutiny of any sort. Both the intellectual respectability and the dramatic interest of the novel's presentation of Baruch suffer as a result.

The novel fails to achieve, then, a coherent, or even an interesting presentation of either the ideological debate between Marxism and Christianity, or of the relationship between characters and their ideologies. It does make surprisingly successful use of ideological conflicts, however, but in a more generalized and poetic way. Barnard Eldershaw showed remarkable insight into the novel when she said that "One feels that the author is more interested in ideas than in people, and in cosmic shapes than in either".¹ In fact the two fundamental "cosmic shapes" of the novel - those represented by, or embodied in Baruch and Michael - are largely composed of contrasting ways of perceiving and thinking about the world. In the terms of this discussion, perhaps "cosmic forces" would be a better appellation for them. The opposition between these two forces is, as this discussion has indicated, quite a profound one: while Baruch represents light, reason, order and hope, Michael stands for darkness, irrationality, chaos and despair. It is surely in the creation of these opposing "cosmic forces" - the novel's most successful structural contrast - that Stead's use of ideas in this novel is most successful. This poetic structuring of the novel around a pair of profoundly contrasting views of life is undoubtedly one of the novel's most successful experiments. It is also of considerable importance in the context of Stead's work as a whole, anticipating as it does the more particularized, (but also more universal) opposition of the outlooks of Sam and Henny Pollit, in her finest novel The Man Who Loved Children. Before this achievement was possible, however, Stead had to reach a more complex and more radical understanding of the intricate and inextricable ways in which personality and ideology are intertwined.

1. Barnard Eldershaw, op.cit., p.168.

Within the scope of the present study, however, perhaps the most promising aspect of this novel's treatment of personal ideologies is the refreshing and healthy scepticism to which the minor ideologues are subjected. This scepticism about ideologues and the accompanying interest in the complex relationship between ideology and character, both grow stronger in the novels still to be discussed and lead, gradually, to the complex and profound understanding that is shown in the novels of Stead's maturity, in which it is successfully integrated with the more poetic qualities of her writing that are so excitingly displayed in this, her first novel.

CHAPTER 3

THE SALZBURG TALES

The Salzburg Tales, which was written after Seven Poor Men of Sydney but before Stead's second novel, The Beauties and Furies, represents both a digression and a progression in Stead's literary career. There are many brilliant stories in this collection, and these confirm the suspicions aroused in the reader by Seven Poor Men that Stead's talents are well suited to shorter prose forms. In the context of Stead's whole literary career to date, however, it is clear that her most outstanding and enduring achievements have been in novel form, and that her short stories are best regarded as a distinguished, but minor part of her overall achievement. Viewed in terms of her development as a novelist, The Salzburg Tales is to a large degree a digression. The shorter forms encourage indulgence in the high-pitched literary virtuosity that is both the strength and the almost fatal weakness of Seven Poor Men. As her second novel, The Beauties and Furies, shows, such indulgence can be disastrous in the novel, where it can so easily lead to a fragmentation and diffusion of the more sustained effects upon which the larger form relies for its success.

Nevertheless, The Salzburg Tales does show a significant advance over Seven Poor Men, particularly in the areas with which this study is concerned, and so it is worthy of some consideration here. This advance consists largely of a considerable broadening of intellectual horizons that leads to a more tolerant, less polemical approach to ideology. The author seems rather less concerned with the rightness or wrongness of her characters' views than with the ways in which these views relate to the inner realities of their personalities. Her vision of character is now a profoundly ironic one, and one of the major interests of The Salzburg Tales is the growing mastery of the ironic mode of presentation that is demonstrated in it, from the gentle and affectionate irony of the Frenchwoman's Tale: "Gaspard", to the savage undercutting irony of "In Doulcemer". The former reveals the new found tolerance referred to earlier - the Frenchwoman so affectionately characterized is in fact a member of the decaying European aristocracy - while the latter reveals the author's perennial hostility towards bourgeois romanticizing and pretentiousness, already revealed

in her presentation of the Folliots in Seven Poor Men, and soon to play a centrally important part in her next novel, The Beauties and Furies.

"In Doulcemer", the Doctor's Tale, is a masterpiece of savagely ironic comedy. The Doctor, an art collector, unexpectedly meets some old friends in a decaying Alpine village that has been overrun by urban artists, who have, sadly, brought their love of malicious gossip, their consuming envy, and their thirst for money and fame along with them to their idyllic retreat. The unfortunate doctor is subject to an outpouring of venomous gossip from his old friends, who have, in their own words, "'gone back to Nature'" ("In Doulcemer", p.140). Nina and Stepan, the leading figures of this unhappy community, are making huge profits by selling cottages several times over to newly-arrived aspiring artists - very few stay for long. Sophie, the doctor's friend, has been retailing all the malicious gossip about them that she has accumulated over the years, and ends by confirming the reader's suspicions that she is a hypocrite.

'They say,' said Sophie earnestly, 'that once Nina looked for him all day, and ran all over the village with her bouncing trot, to the watchmakers, to the churchyard, to the hills, to the château, to all the cottages, calling across the empty pastures towards evening, "Stepan, Stepan!" she began to cry at the end, the only time anyone saw her eyes moist. The artists laughed behind curtains thinking, "perhaps the poor devil has given her the slip!" Presently Nina had to satisfy a certain need: she had been so anxious all day that she had not had time to think about it before. She went to the proper place, could not get in, heard the key turn in the lock, and there found Stepan looking innocent and content. All day in the calm and cool of the little house he had escaped her, and thought about his girls and his bloody deeds. So they say, but it is really a wicked, malicious, little world down here, when it starts telling tales.'

("In Doulcemer", p.152)

At the end of this story, Stead neatly sums up the situation of the village, by analogy, in the figure of the tightrope walker, crossing a nearby gorge. Predictably, he falls. This device is interesting, however, as an anticipation of the large scale device of using the Banque Mercure as an illuminating metaphor of personality, in House of All Nations.

Another of Stead's favourite targets for denunciation, the egotistic male chauvinist, also figures quite prominently in The Salzburg Tales. In "The Marionettist", the father's heartlessness and selfishness are revealed with admirable subtlety and control, while in "Overcote", a similar figure, a profoundly egocentric and hypocritical "free thinker", is denounced quite directly by his daughter through this, her story. This is a less subtle, but surely a more powerful attack.

My father was a free-thinker. He attended church every Sunday, coming in late to make a disturbance, and sitting in the front row to laugh and make remarks aloud about Darwin and Galileo to annoy the Minister during the sermons. The minister prayed aloud for the salvation of my father's soul, to his face, every Sunday. We were shamed by the conduct of our father, but some of the villagers laughed in private, when the minister would not hear of it. Father used to go to the back-room of the public-house after Church to prove the Government was wrong, and to prove there was no hell: and he would come home laughing provokingly, mimicking the villager who said, taking his pipe from his cracked yellow teeth: 'Yes, but, schoolmaster, them vulcanoos, where does the fire come from?' and to whom he replied: 'The earth has a boil and the boil busts.' We never laughed at that, although we could not resist listening to his highly-coloured stories: we expected to see the walls crack some day at his profanity and irreligion. An old villager said to me privately, taking me aside after the service once: 'It ain't right, Milly: it ain't me that wishes your father harm, but he should watch out: the Lord will remember them words some day.'

("Overcote", pp.475-6)

This figure is familiar to the reader well-versed in Stead's work. He appears several times in her work, most memorably as Sam Pollit in The Man Who Loved Children. It is ironic that Stead herself appeared to share this man's contempt for and intolerance of the Christian religion in Seven Poor Men of Sydney. It seems clear that considerable intellectual and moral progress has been made since that novel was written. Perhaps the influence of William Blake is, at this stage, beginning to have profound and far-reaching effects by being better assimilated into Stead's own intellectual and imaginative vision. In any case this newly achieved insight

into the mask-like aspects of personal ideology serves the author very well in the novels still to be discussed; indeed it is central to both of them.

It should be stated at the outset of this discussion that *The Beauties and Furies* is the least successful of the three novels to be considered in this study. Gering regards it as Stein's "poorest book" and Stein herself has regarded it as unworthy of serious discussion.¹ As Gering goes on to point out, however, it is significant in a number of ways, particularly in the way in which it takes up themes that were introduced in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, and anticipates the concerns of later, more successful novels like *For Love Alone* and *The Way the World Collapses*. From the viewpoint of the present study, it is of considerable interest, and shows significant advances over *Seven Poor Men* in the author's understanding of the complexities and, more particularly, the ironies involved in the relationship between personality and ideological position.

CHAPTER 4

Perhaps brief mention should be made, at this point, of the reasons for the failure of the novel. Certainly the kaleidoscopic diversity of style and approach of *Seven Poor Men* has been, to some extent, brought under control, but the surprising and unfortunate consequence is that the two distinct and perhaps incompatible styles of presentation. The fatal weakness, however, is that these two contrasting styles of presentation tend to split the characters into two distinct groups, rather in the way that the "parties" characters, Michael, Kol and Catherine are separated from the realistically presented characters in *Seven Poor Men*. As Gering points out,

1. Gering, op.cit., p. 55.

2. In a recent talk with the author, (Miss Stein has kindly given her permission for her comments to be reproduced here).

It should be stated at the outset of this discussion that The Beauties and Furies is the least successful of the three novels to be considered in this study. Geering regards it as Stead's "poorest book"¹ and Stead herself now regards it as unworthy of serious discussion.² As Geering goes on to point out, however, it is significant in a number of ways, particularly in the ways in which it takes up themes that were introduced in Seven Poor Men of Sydney, and anticipates the concerns of later, more successful novels like For Love Alone and The Man Who Loved Children. From the viewpoint of the present study, it is of considerable interest, and shows significant advances over Seven Poor Men in the author's understanding of the complexities and, more particularly, the ironies involved in the relationship between personality and ideological position.

Perhaps brief mention should be made, at this point, of the reasons for the overall failure of the novel. Certainly the kaleidoscopic diversity of style and approach of Seven Poor Men has been, to some extent, brought under control, but the surprising and unfortunate consequence is that the novel falls into two distinct parts that reflect two distinct and perhaps incompatible styles of presentation. The fatal weakness, however, is that these two contrasting styles of presentation tend to split the characters into two distinct groups, rather in the way that the "poetic" characters, Michael, Kol and Catherine are separated from the realistically presented characters in Seven Poor Men. As Geering points out,

1. Geering, op.cit. p.56.

2. In a recent talk with the author. (Miss Stead has kindly given her permission for her comments to be reproduced here).

The real trouble lies, rather, with characters like Marpurgo and (to a lesser extent) Coromandel, who do not function on the same level as the realistically presented characters. Elvira, Oliver and Paul live fairly commonplace lives and the reader accepts them as they come - in realistic terms; what jolts him is the way Marpurgo, who seems to have come from an altogether different world, is brought into this area of ordinary human relationships and made to operate there.¹

Marpurgo and Coromandel - even the names are bizarre - are fantastic creations. Coromandel is fantastic in her appearance and in the settings in which she appears, while Marpurgo is fantastic primarily in his monologues, filled as they are with outlandish words and baffling flights of fancy. Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of these characters for the reader is that they are described by the narrator with bizarre words and fantastic images. When these two characters appear together, as they do in Chapter VII, where Marpurgo woos Coromandel, the novel becomes utterly unreadable.

Marpurgo edged closer and leaned towards the other table, the lucent epidermis of his face pallid with excitement and self-intoxication; he had reached the rare corybantic hour that he struggled for, his low voice was splintered by the stridor of sorcery, he trembled with the internal dithyrambs of megalomania.

'Creation is rearrangement, choice^{over} of chaos: we who are droppings of the winds only get joy in symmetry, rhythmus, isotropes and figments of perfection. We have no god but Ieros Logos. I used to dream of writing a treatise on universal harmony, you know -

"In harmony, in heavenly harmony,

This universal frame began, . . ."
now, like Nicomachus of Gerase, I would write it for a lady who is the crystalline pith of divine proportion, the egg that floated on the waters. Eros -- 'His voice wavered; he raised his finger. 'I started with Pythagoras. I am like, am, Luca Pacioli, the monk "drunk with beauty", friend of Leonardo, that Protean son of genius. . . .'

Coromandel murmured: 'You are the monk of beauty and I am the canon of Polycletus - is that the idea?'

(Chap. VII, pp.245-6)

Disastrous as these passages are - and there are many of them - it is, as Geering points out, the author's attempt to present Marpurgo as something of a raisonneur in relation to the central drama - the affair of Oliver and Elvira - that

1. Geering, op.cit., p.62.

undermines the novel's more serious intentions, which might otherwise have been quite successfully achieved.

It is these "more serious intentions", of course, that make the novel worthy of consideration in this study, and while it is true that this central weakness obscures, diffuses and even undermines them, they do remain sufficiently clear to admit of serious discussion. The novel has obvious links with Seven Poor Men of Sydney. Fulke and Marion Folliot, it will be remembered, were a bourgeois couple shown to be indulging in left-wing political activity as a sort of romantic adventure. Oliver Fenton and Elvira Western are in a rather similar position, a bourgeois couple looking for escape, romance and adventure in the politically tumultuous Paris of the early 1930's. The crucial difference between this couple and the Folliots is that Elvira is a married woman who leaves her quiet, passive married life in London for the romantic attractions of the young and handsome Oliver, a student in Paris. The novel follows the course of their affair, revealing Elvira's gradual disillusionment with Paris, with Oliver, and with the very possibility of escape and romance for a woman of her bourgeois background and outlook. As even this brief outline suggests, the novel sets out to expose the illusory nature of the bourgeois conception of romance and in particular the romantic, sentimental picture of bohemian life in Paris projected by such popular works as Puccini's "La Bohème". In its determination to get at the truth behind the popular myth, this novel is closely aligned with the central thrust of much of Stead's best work, alongside House of All Nations, a study of international finance, and her most radical work, The Man Who Loved Children, an exposure of that most cherished of bourgeois myths, family life. Although it is far less successful in its aims than either of these novels, The Beauties and Furies does have something of the same effect on the reader of upsetting his initial expectations and of discomfiting him with a brutally honest exposure of a comfortable illusion.

Strangely, Geering almost completely overlooks this aspect of The Beauties and Furies in his book. He does, however, point to other areas where this novel anticipates

later and better work. He rightly regards Oliver as a precursor of Jonathan Crow, in For Love Alone, but does not point out the connections that exist between these two characters and the hypocritical father figures of Sam Pollit and Andrew Hawkins (of For Love Alone). As a result, he seems to miss one of the central points about Oliver, and those others, namely that he is an incorrigible hypocrite of a sort that seems to be peculiarly male. Elvira points this out to him quite trenchantly, in response to his use of the catch-cry "exploited labour" to describe the prostitutes of Paris -

'Exploited labour, that's how I look at them,' said Oliver. 'I never could go to them, any more than I could sweat a workman.'

'It's all a formula,' proposed Elvira. 'You could exploit a woman in a house, making her wait on you and cook for you, turning her into an idiot with ideas about mouseholes and curtain-rods, while you wrote essays on labour-unions. It's just the same, I see no difference.'

(Chap.IV, p.134)

This is surely true of all of the hypocritical male characters referred to, and, in fact, anticipates the central irony of the figure of Sam Pollit in The Man Who Loved Children. Unlike Sam, Oliver is not shown "exploiting a woman in a house", but there is a different, but no less damning irony in the fact that he later uses a prostitute himself, despite the well-founded Marxist objection to their use that he propounds so pompously here.

There is a strong feminist element in this scathing comment of Elvira's, and in fact she makes many such deflating remarks at Oliver's expense in the course of the novel. It is not surprising, then, that Geering sees Elvira's development in the novel as its main centre of interest, by analogy, apparently, with the career of Teresa in For Love Alone.¹ This study will take the view, however, that while Elvira is the character in whom the central disillusionment or enlightenment takes place, Stead's presentation of her is fraught with inconsistencies to such an extent that she is a profoundly unsatisfactory, even unbelievable character. It is proposed by this study, rather, that Oliver is the character in whom the author is most interested, the character

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

who is most thoroughly scrutinized in the novel and indeed who represents Stead's first fully successful achievement in realistic, ironic characterization.

It was proposed earlier that the novel is largely concerned with exposing bourgeois romanticism as worthless, as nothing more than a dream of escape, but while it is true that it is Elvira who makes this discovery in the novel, it is nonetheless true that the author's focus is on Oliver as an embodiment of the attractions of romance, and that her purpose is as much to expose the emptiness and selfishness of Oliver himself, as to make this more general exposure of romance. Of course these two purposes are to a large extent interlocking and inextricable ones. Perhaps a brief excursion into biographical conjecture can help in making this clear. Oliver is clearly an early portrait of the man later presented as Jonathan Crow, the character who toys with the affections of Teresa Hawkins so cruelly and selfishly in For Love Alone. Stead has agreed that For Love Alone is "semi-autobiographical",¹ and it seems a reasonable inference that she was herself for a long time infatuated with a man like Jonathan, and his precursor, Oliver. Another reasonable inference from For Love Alone is that Stead herself saved up and travelled to England with a view to re-establishing her relationship with this man, then a student in London. All this leads one to suspect that Stead had very strong personal reasons for the hostility that she shows in the novel towards Oliver Fenton and towards the romantic illusions that had in her own case led to disillusionment, humiliation and misery.

If these speculations are applied to the other characters, some interesting inferences can be made. Clearly Elvira is a very different person from the Christina Stead of that period, both in externals and in real nature; the comparison with Teresa makes this clear. Elvira is older,

1. Interview in A.L.S., 233.

and wiser, and is aware of many of Oliver's weaknesses at the outset of the affair. Through her, Stead can perhaps have the satisfaction of being wise in retrospect. Marpurgo is a more problematic case. Stead has claimed that he is a portrait of a friend of William Blake's,¹ but throughout the novel, especially when he is presented as authoritative - usually in his denunciations of Oliver - the reader familiar with Stead's work as a whole gains a strong suspicion that Marpurgo is, in part, a portrait of William Blake himself. Perhaps the most convincing evidence for this is contained in Chapter II (pp.39-64), when Marpurgo is in the office of the brothers Fuseaux, the lace dealers for whom he works as a lace-buyer. This scene anticipates, in every essential detail, the many scenes involving Michel Alphendéry, and Jules and William Bertillon in House of All Nations. Even the idiosyncratic styles of speech, and the obsessive plotting of schemes are anticipated here. In this scene Marpurgo's role very closely parallels that of Alphendéry, who is, on Stead's admission, a portrait of William Blake.² It seems likely then, that Marpurgo is a sort of composite portrait of William Blake and his Munchausen-like friend. Indeed a close reading of the novel reveals a sort of split personality in Marpurgo - part fantasist, part mature worldly-wise judge of men. The biographical inference fits well then with the internal evidence.

Insofar as Marpurgo is a portrait of William Blake, his presentation suffers from a lack of distancing irony, just as that of Baruch Mendelssohn did in Seven Poor Men, and this points out one of the major weaknesses of the intellectual design of the novel, namely that Marpurgo's more serious pronouncements, be they on political issues or on the manifest weaknesses of Oliver, are presented with the same uncritical endorsement as those of Baruch in Seven Poor Men. In addition, his extreme egotism is exempt from the sort of criticism that is applied to that of Oliver, and his actions, like Baruch's, are apparently above question. The result is that not only is there the obvious disjunction between the fantasist Marpurgo and the realistically presented characters, but there is a further disjunction between the realistic presentation of Marpurgo and that of the other characters.

1. Ibid., 237. 2. Ibid., 238.

The scepticism that is applied to Oliver and Elvira and the relationship between them, upon which the overall intellectual thrust of the novel relies, is conspicuously absent in the presentation of Marpurgo and his questionable pronouncements, and as a result the intellectual validity of the more serious side of the novel is weakened quite considerably.

In terms of its presentation of the relationship between ideology and character this novel represents a significant advance over Seven Poor Men of Sydney, particularly in the full-scale portrait that it presents of the egotistic ideologue Oliver Fenton. Certainly the weakness of the figure of Marpurgo indicates that Stead is still unable to present a portrait of William Blake with a proper degree of artistic control and distancing, and it is not until House of All Nations that this important step forward is shown to have been made. The importance of Stead's achievement in creating the figure of Oliver Fenton should not be underestimated, however. A comparison between Oliver and Jonathan Crow, his counterpart in For Love Alone, reveals that although Stead was much closer to the prototype when she created Oliver, her perceptions were by no means blunted thereby, and, indeed, that the earlier portrait gains force from both the lingering bitterness and the intimate knowledge that went into its creation. It is consistent with this view that most of the following discussion will be concerned with the figure of Oliver. Many of the deflating and undercutting remarks made at his expense come from Elvira, and so the discussion of Oliver will inevitably reveal a good deal about her. Oliver's treatment of her in the course of their unhappy affair is also of considerable importance to the novel's presentation of him, and further insight into Elvira will be gained in the discussion of this. It is the view of this study, however, that, in the final analysis, Elvira is more successful as a vehicle through whom the many faults of Oliver are revealed, and through whom the more general critique of romance is presented, than she is as a character in her own right. Further attention will be given to this double role of Elvira's when the discussion of Oliver is complete. As the broad outlines of the novel's examination

of ideology and character have already been revealed, the following discussion can, without loss, be made brief.

Stead, like his obvious antecedents in French realist work, is a writer of *roman à thèse*. He is the artist who has "gone back to nature" in "reality", and he is the political writer of "reality". In this sense, he adopts an ideological position in order to impress others, to acquire a certain glamour, and thereby to fulfill his sense of his own importance. His ideological stance is put on like a fashionable garment, as it were, and can just as easily be discarded. Total commitment to Marxism would involve him in political action, and this is unacceptable to him because, as the logician that he is at heart, he is unwilling to endanger his career as an ambassador to England arrested or imprisoned. As Anthony Burgess observed after meeting him for the first time, "He's an extremely revolutionary" (Chap. III, p. 107).

In what is to become Stead's favorite mode of revealing hypocrisy in her characters, a technique that first appears in *The Salisbury Tale*, she has Oliver confess himself through his own words. Oliver comments on the fact that she and her husband entertained at Grand Hotel in Paris. Oliver reveals his own inactive part in the disturbance. Although he was not prepared to put his theories into action, his use of a double standard enables him to excuse the young bourgeois who did the kidnapping and who were active.

"If I hadn't been a foreigner, and had no money to finish my career, I would have been down in the streets with them. After one night the workers had the streets to themselves. The girls who were out with their boys for a late night supper were put into rows and well protected with rifles after that night, and after a little while the streets were locked up until one o'clock in the morning. Working in the police station and singing 'We want more bread'!" (Chap. III, p. 107)

Stead's ambivalent hostility towards Oliver, referred to earlier, is displayed more directly in heavily ironic narrative passages such as the following:

It has already been remarked that, although Oliver Fenton is the first large-scale portrait of the ideological poseur, he has obvious antecedents in Stead's earlier work, in Fulke Folliot of Seven Poor Men, in the artists who have "gone back to Nature" in "In Doulcemer", and in the tyrannical father of "Overcote". Like them, he adopts an ideological position in order to impress others, to acquire a certain glamour, and thereby to inflate his sense of his own importance. His ideological stances are put on like a fashionable garment, as it were, and can just as easily be discarded. Total commitment to Marxism would involve him in political action, and this is unacceptable to him because, as the bourgeois that he is at heart, he is unwilling to endanger his career as an academic by being arrested or imprisoned. As Antoine Fuseaux observes after meeting him for the first time, "'he's an armchair revolutionary'" (Chap.III, p.102).

In what is to become Stead's favourite means of revealing hypocrisy in her characters - a technique that first appears in The Salzburg Tales - she has Oliver condemn himself through his own words. Elvira comments on the fears that she and her husband entertained of armed revolution in Paris. Oliver reveals his own inactive part in the disturbance. Although he was not prepared to put his Marxism into action, his use of a double standard enables him to scoff at the young bourgeois who did put their political views into action and were arrested as a result.

'If I hadn't been a foreigner, and been so anxious to finish my essay,' said Oliver, 'I would have been down in the streets with them. After one night the workers had the streets to themselves: the fils de papa who come out with billies for a lark after supper only ventured into areas well protected with police after that night, and after a little scuffle got themselves safely locked up until two o'clock in the morning, rowdying in the police-station and singing "We must have a king!"'

(Chap.III, p.83)

Stead's authorial hostility towards Oliver, referred to earlier, is displayed more directly in heavily ironic narrative passages such as the following:

Oliver returned from the great United Front meeting at the Mur des Fédérés on May 27 on foot, with a group of French workmen. He had been called 'camarade' so often during the day, had seen so many red flags and so many sinewy arms lifted into the air, had heard the 'Internationale' and 'The Young Guard' so often, that he was no longer himself, a piecemeal student grubbing on collegiate benches, but a glorious foot-soldier in an army millions strong, sure of battery, but sure of victory.

(Chap.V, p.138)

The undercutting irony here is acceptable, and indeed welcome, as it arises from an intimate knowledge of Oliver and his weaknesses, and is consistent with the overall dramatic presentation of him. It is in sharp contrast with the authorial hostility towards, for example, Michael's mother in Seven Poor Men, in that it is sustained, consistent, and controlled, and most importantly perhaps, it seems justified to the reader. Perhaps Marpurgo gives the best brief assessment of Oliver's espousal of Marxism, in his scathing, comprehensive attack on him towards the end of the novel. Incidentally, his assessment of Oliver's moral or "religious" position is equally valid.

'Religiously, you're a eudaemonist: in economics, a utilitarian, I'm sure: Marxism is just the newer label for a smart young man who must be up to date. You're a coward, not because you're anaemic, but because you don't want your sweet tick-tock disturbed: . . .'

(Chap.X, p.324)

The novel does more than just expose Oliver's Marxism as a pose, however. It goes on to reveal, through his own actions and words, as well as the comments of others, that he has in fact a thoroughly bourgeois outlook beneath the veneer of Marxism. After she has left Oliver and returned to her original position as a doctor's wife, Elvira declares that it was this realization - that Oliver is really a bourgeois - that was decisive.

'"It's hateful being a bourgeois. I really went with Oliver because I didn't think he was a bourgeois. But he's just the new bourgeois, the nervous, shying one who has to talk sham-socialism."'

(Chap.XII, p.374)

This statement of Elvira's relates to the novel's more general critique of romance as well as to its particular critique of Oliver, and reveals the link between the two: Elvira thought she was escaping from the bourgeoisie by joining Oliver in Paris, but the romantic appeal of this gesture was destroyed by her realization that Oliver is himself a bourgeois. Thus both the romantic attractions of Oliver and her escape from the bourgeoisie were illusory. Her judgement of Oliver here is borne out both by his actions and his words in the course of the novel.

Quite early in the novel it becomes clear that Oliver has an orthodox English bourgeois sense of the proprieties. When Elvira tells him that she has had a long conversation with the prostitute Blanche d'Anizy, in which Blanche has revealed a great deal about her experiences, Oliver is obviously somewhat shocked, despite his earlier laudatory remarks on the political awareness of the prostitutes of Paris, and the defence he has just made of the broadmindedness of the French (Chap.III, p.87; Chap.IV, pp.114-15).

'She obliged with her life-history. It doesn't seem to be a secret. I suppose it's quite true.'

'Oh, it's true.'

He was silent for a while: 'Elvira, I oughtn't to get you into company like that: you ought to have friends of your own sort. . . .'

'She's a woman and she's got sense. I admire the way she battles through. You sound a bit narrow.'

(Chap.IV, p.116)

Clearly, Elvira is the more broadminded of the two in practice. It must be admitted, in fairness to Oliver, that on this occasion he admits his fault. While this attitude of Oliver's could perhaps be attributed to the lingering influence of his upbringing, his repeatedly stated desire to go into business and make money is less easily reconciled with his Marxist pretensions. Marpurgo encourages him to do so, with a characteristically double-edged comment - "' - you'd succeed: you're hard as granite inside'" (Chap.V, p.142). Much later on, Oliver reveals himself as an archetypal bourgeois through his own words, at the same time of course showing up his espousal of Marxism for the pose that it is.

'I don't like to think about money. I'd like to go into business just to make money easily, you know: so as not to know where it come from. In scholarship, you've got to strain over every penny so that your whole life is absorbed by money. You can't have children, you can't buy the books and pictures business-men buy, your wife's dressed like a frump - and you're the aesthete! What a contradiction! It goes without saying business-men are more cultivated than we are: they have the money. Now I reckon with my background and my love of material comfort, I could get somewhere in business. I've been thinking it out. Then, look at Elvira: she loves goods. It's a pity we weren't born in the merchant ages: we'd make a wonderful couple in a cloth-house.'

(Chap.X, pp.321-2)

This speaks for itself, but perhaps it is worth remarking, as the author clearly intends that it should be noticed, that Oliver's desire to avoid "'thinking about money'" and "'where it comes from'", by dealing in and acquiring material goods, is close to a definitive statement of the characteristic bourgeois approach to, or rather evasion of, economic realities.

It is difficult to see how Oliver could reconcile such a statement with his many Marxist pronouncements. Certainly Marpurgo punctures his Marxist pretensions mercilessly in the attack quoted earlier, but Oliver was somewhat inebriated at that time, and in any case would regard Marpurgo as a rather hostile witness. The only occasions on which he is forced to take account, even briefly, of adverse judgements on his claims to being a romantic, radical figure are when such judgements are put to him by the very women whom he thinks he has deceived. When Elvira reflects on the impossibility of escape for "'surburban'" people, she includes Oliver as one of these, much to his chagrin.

'That's what we are, you see: suburban, however wild we run. You know quite well, in yourself, don't you, two people like us can't go wild? Still it's nice to pretend to, for a while.'

'For a while,' he echoed, and going a little pale.

(Chap.III, p.98)

It is perhaps even more disconcerting for Oliver when Blanche d'Anizy makes the same judgement upon him. Oliver has a high regard for his prowess as a philanderer, and it is easy to sense the deflating effect that Blanche's comments have on him, coming as they do in response to a flirtatious remark of his.

He said umbrageously : 'Who said I wanted to be left alone?'

'I insist. You must stay in your character. If you sank into vice, you would never get up again; it is not the breath of your nostrils. You must live and die respectable. A respectable man gone wrong is not amusing at all: you would bore me, or any other woman.'

(Chap.VI, pp.223-4)

In such moments as these, when Oliver's mantle of glamour is in tatters, the reader cannot help feeling just a little sympathy for him.

Another exchange between Blanche and Oliver reveals, again through Blanche's trenchancy, a different but no less foolish area of conceit and affectation in him - his pretensions as a Gallophile. There is a continuing debate between Oliver and Elvira on the relative merits of the English and the French. Oliver is loud in his praises of, among other things, the broadmindedness, the tradition of radicalism, and the literary style of the French. Elvira responds with an unaffected Anglocentrism that is infused, however, with her characteristic scepticism. A good illustration of this debate is to be found in Chapter IV, where Oliver praises the broadmindedness and compassion of the French in their approach to social relations, while Elvira prefers to interpret the evidence as revealing a "'money philosophy'". So persuasive is Elvira's argument that Oliver is forced to modify his position (Chap.IV, pp.114-15). The following exchange between Oliver and Blanche, however, is a far more memorable one, indeed one of the most memorable in the novel. Oliver is self-consciously philandering, and is delighted to hear Blanche recite some lines of Baudelaire; his fantasies of romance have been fulfilled, and he is brimming with romantic ardour. A moment later, however, the aura of romance is shattered and Oliver wants to get away from Blanche as quickly as he

can. At the beginning of this passage Blanche translates her recitation for Oliver.

She translated, 'I will be thy coffin, sweet pestilence! The witness of thy strength and virulence, dear poison, prepared by the angels! Liqueur that gnaws me. O, life and death of my heart! ' The evening air was still fresh. Oliver shivered.

'It is impressive! The poison is passion!'

'And syphilis,' she said in a husky whisper.

'He died of syphilis.' After a moment, she added:

'But for most of them it is one and the same.

Who can escape it? My husband poisoned me,

Maurice has it, Andrew is falling to pieces with it.' Oliver's arm stiffened, but he made an effort and did not withdraw it. 'No one can escape,' said Blanche, drunk and sibylline.

(Chap.VI, p.221)

This blackly comic moment grows in stature when one realizes that it encapsulates in many respects the whole conception of the novel; it is profoundly characterizing of Oliver, the pretentious and ultimately rather foolish romantic, and it contains in microcosm the polemical point and method of the whole novel, in that it exposes the absurdity of romance through a skilfully chosen and well-timed touch of harsh reality.

It is in the relationship between Oliver and Elvira that the anti-romantic thrust of the novel is given dramatic force, and it is Elvira's pregnancy, above all, that brings the two of them into contact with the realities underlying the romantic aura of their Parisian affair. Notwithstanding Elvira's formulation of the basis of her disillusionment with Oliver, it is clear from the dramatic action as a whole that it is Oliver's failure to fulfil his responsibilities to her in her pregnancy that is the truly decisive factor in her disillusionment with him. Insofar as Elvira's pregnancy represents a test of Oliver's love for her, he fails the test in the most comprehensive manner imaginable. Not only does he urge Elvira to have an abortion, in callous disregard for her obvious desire to bear the child, but he also takes advantage of the indisposition consequent on Elvira's abortion by indulging his egotistic penchant for philandering with a number of other women. If male insensitivity and

selfishness is taken to be implied by Elvira's use of the term "bourgeois", then Oliver's repellent behaviour at this point proves that he is bourgeois in the fullest sense of the term; to Oliver, women are material possessions like all the others that he covets, but as they cost little they command little respect, and are indeed disposable.

Of course Oliver is adept at making high-sounding pronouncements about the "oppressed" status of women, as his labelling of the prostitutes as "'exploited labour'" has already indicated. Elsewhere he makes higher claims to being a liberal in his attitudes to women.

'I respect women as I respect men. I'm one of the few men who doesn't instinctively feel any difference between men and women.'

(Chap.IV, p.126)

In his relationship with Elvira he is, predictably, very good at giving extravagant expression to his feelings for her, and at making commitments that he has no intention of fulfilling. In the following passage, he indulges his weakness for romanticizing, this time doing his best to give a romantic colouring to the sort of life that is in fact most abhorrent to him - a life of poverty.

'Even if Paul gets bitter and makes a public affair out of it,' said Oliver to Elvira, 'we will stand together. I will get a job myself. I will take a clerk's job - anything. We'll get along. I've never feared the future, and with you behind me all will be well. Love has a first option on our lives.'

(Chap.III, p.94)

Perhaps Elvira should have considered herself fortunate, in retrospect, that she never embarked on such a life with Oliver. In the event the suspicions that she already entertains about Oliver are soon confirmed by his response to her announcement that she is pregnant. Her disillusionment with Oliver and his pious words is poignantly enacted in this incident. Oliver claims to be delighted at the news, but immediately takes up Elvira's tentative suggestion that she should have an abortion. Although he reasserts his willingness to accept and love the child, Elvira has been awakened to the emptiness of his words. She gives expression to this painful realization in the following passage, which is

surely the most moving piece of dialogue in the novel. It begins when Oliver, unable to bear her sobbing at the prospect of an abortion, tries to comfort her with hollow assurances. Elvira recalls some romantic fantasy of his from an earlier occasion, and suddenly appreciates the sharp, but ultimately grim irony that it has acquired in retrospect.

'Oh dear, oh dear, it's so funny.' She went on giggling.

He stared at her. 'What's funny, Elvira?'

'Oh dear, I just remembered that dream you had, when you dreamed I was the Madonna : oh dear, and you found it came true. Oh dear! ...' She held her chest, catching for breath, writhing in her chair, her muscles snapping like a sparking wire, leaning over in her lap and dropping tears of hilarity, her mouth disfigured, her eyes beginning to widen, her soft dun brow flushing, her hair entangled. Oliver stared at her leaning forward, on his hands ready to spring up.

'Elvira, don't : you're hysterical.'

'Oh, oh, oh! ...' she managed to say.

'Oh, it's too funny : I can just see your face.... Oh, oh, oh! ... your dream ...came ... true....' She began to be shaken by spasms of laughter, more like electric shocks than laughs : her face was drawn now, now merry, her mouth dribbled, her wide open eyes were full of tears : she gaped and grinned.

Frightened out of his wits, Oliver started forward and put his arms clumsily round her. Immediately, she bent herself in the shape of a bow and fought him off with her hands and knees.

'Go away, get away, don't touch me, don't dare touch me!'

(Chap.IV, p.121)

In this scene, Elvira certainly commands the reader's sympathies, and is a truly dramatic character. At the same time, of course, she is also revealing Oliver's inadequacies to the reader.

It seems appropriate to end discussion of Oliver at this point, and to turn to consideration of Elvira. Before doing so, perhaps it is worthwhile to point out that Oliver is shown, at the end of the novel, to have learnt nothing from his relationship with Elvira, except that he has become aware of his ability to attract women, at least for long enough to be able to exploit them sexually - a rather negative piece of learning. In the concluding pages of the novel he

is shown exercising this faculty on a chance acquaintance as he leaves Paris by train. Significantly, his last words are "'I simply can't resist women, thank goodness'" (Chap.XII, p.383). The implication is, of course, that the unhappy affair of Oliver and Elvira is to go on repeating itself as long as there are women naive enough to be deceived by the surface charms of Oliver and all the other men of his type.

As the previous discussion has shown, Elvira does at times acquire the full stature of a dramatically presented character. It is the contention of this study, however, that the author's interest is centred on Oliver, and that Elvira's role is primarily that of observer and critic of Oliver, like Marpurgo. While Marpurgo is clearly intended as a critic of Oliver's intellectual pretensions, Elvira is more concerned with his inadequacies as a lover and as a man. This may seem a strange view of Elvira's part in their affair, but it is the view of her role that she repeatedly puts forward herself, as the following passages illustrate.

'Paul still broods over me and looms over me as he did in the beginning : but you're more a companion, a brother, more like a playmate. I thought of your breast all the time. I wanted to see if the same sleep and darkness comes over me on every man's breast, just the same. I wasn't so curious about the rest, all men are the same, practically. And I just wanted to see, if in continuing in my own line, you know, just peering, being curious, analysing, being objective, even in love, and I am, I could get any new experiences.'

(Chap.III, p.80)

'I thought, a relation like ours can't be broken up so soon, so someone must make an experiment, and it had better be me than Paul. A man can never remember he is making an experiment. As soon as he loves another woman physically, he thinks he is head over heels in love, and he will throw everything away for her. Women have a more practical sense, a more cynical sense of human relations. They know nothing is worth all that bother.'

(Chap.V, p.175)

Clearly there is a degree of inconsistency between the Elvira of these statements and the sympathetic, dramatically involved Elvira of the long passage quoted earlier. This inconsistency cannot be satisfactorily resolved, as the novel relies both on her objectivity as an observer, for its central anti-romantic argument, and on her capacity as a victim of Oliver's duplicity, for its dramatic force. It is perhaps this fundamental inconsistency in the presentation of Elvira that prevents the reader from taking a serious interest in her as a character in the way that Geering suggests that he should. When Stead returns to the same basic material in For Love Alone, she takes a much more autobiographical approach, with the result that Elvira's counterpart, Teresa, is a far more successful character. The result is still not entirely satisfactory, however; for example, Oliver's counterpart, Jonathan Crow, is in many ways less successful. It seems that the problems involved for the author in re-creating this part of her experience are close to insurmountable. In the case of The Beauties and Furies it is proposed by this study that the presentation of Elvira is seriously flawed, and that the novel's only successful character, a considerable achievement nevertheless, is Oliver Fenton. Elvira is successful in both of her roles, but they are incompatible roles, except in that they are both effective ways of revealing the falsity and emptiness of Oliver, and the illusory nature of romance. Both the weaknesses and the successes of the figure of Elvira are well indicated by juxtaposing the following passages. The first of these occurs before her pregnancy and her subsequent disillusionment with Oliver, while the second occurs much later, after she has returned to her husband.

'That's what we are, you see: suburban, however wild we run. You know quite well, in yourself, don't you, two people like us can't go wild?'

(Chap.III, p.98)

''I really went with Oliver because I didn't think he was bourgeois. But he's just the new bourgeois, the nervous, shying one who has to talk sham-socialism.''

(Chap.XII, p.374)

Christina Stead has said that The Beauties and Furies is a transitional work, and this study accepts that appellation, but without the pejorative overtones that she intended.¹ The comparison with Seven Poor Men of Sydney is by no means entirely to its discredit. In its presentation of the relationship between ideology and personality, The Beauties and Furies shows significant advances over the earlier novel. The scepticism that was applied only to the minor ideologues of Seven Poor Men is consistently and effectively applied to the central character of this novel, as is the basis of his success as a character. The enthusiasm for ideas displayed in Seven Poor Men has been replaced by a mature scepticism, based on an understanding of the mask-like nature of much personal ideology, of its capacity to conceal the real nature of its proponent and thereby to deceive others through the surface attractiveness that it creates. The dichotomy of appearance and reality, and its metaphors of mask and façade, become quite explicit in Stead's next novel, House of All Nations, in which they form the basis of its pervading irony.

While Stead displays a healthy scepticism in relation to the pretentious ideologue Oliver Fenton, her control of distancing is still far from complete. As discussion of the novel has shown, both Elvira and Marpurgo are to a larger extent endorsed, authoritative observers, and not only of Oliver Fenton. Oliver is also sometimes endorsed and authoritative in his comments, for example in his observations on businessmen and in his memorable aphoristic comments on the sociology of the novel (Chap.III, pp.102, 134). These, like similar remarks by Elvira and Marpurgo, can be rationalized away in individual cases, but in the novel as a whole there are just too many such "moments of insight", as Geering calls them,² for them to be satisfactorily accounted

1. In a recent conversation with the author.

2. Geering, op.cit., p.59.

for as anything other than lapses of distancing on Stead's part, in which she is using her characters as mouthpieces for her own formulations. Memorable though many of these comments are, dramatic characterization is inevitably compromised by such lapses, particularly in the case of Elvira, who, as has been shown, knows far too much and is far too clear-sighted in her analysis of her own situation to be altogether acceptable as a dramatically involved character. Predictably, the novel suffers as a whole - not just on the level of characterisation - because the author too often resorts to explicit terms to convey her polemic. This weakness was also evident in Seven Poor Men of Sydney, but it is one that never again detracts seriously from the aesthetic stature of Stead's novels.

To anticipate House of All Nations briefly, one of the triumphs of that novel is the way in which Stead employs her gift for aphoristic formulation in a characterizing and dramatically effective manner by presenting the formulations in convincingly individuated language. This progression over The Beauties and Furies is in keeping with the overall advance in dramatic presentation, which is enormous. In House of All Nations, Stead for the first time "refines herself out of existence", in Stephen Dedalus's phrase, and creates a truly "dramatic" novel.¹

Man 1. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p.215.

CHAPTER 5

HOUSE OF ALL NATIONS

Little mention has so far been made in this discussion of Stead's own ideological position. It was pointed out earlier that in Seven Poor Men of Sydney the author displays an enthusiasm for ideas for their own sake, and it was further suggested that the influence of the ideas of William Blake - the Marxist financial expert who later became her husband - was a very powerful one in that novel. The attitude towards Marxism embodied by Seven Poor Men as a whole seems to be one of qualified enthusiasm. Joseph Baguenault, its central and most representative character, is persuaded by the Marxist analysis of his situation, but remains sceptical of the ability of a Marxist revolution to bring about any improvement in the condition of "poor men" like himself. The attractions of Marxist ideology are counterbalanced by his irreducible faith in his own empirical judgement. It seems reasonable to surmise that Stead shared Joseph's ambivalence towards Marxism at that time. The author reveals different kinds of reservations about Marxism through some of the minor characters in that novel. Their espousal of Marxism is shown to be motivated by personal bitterness, emotional imbalance or merely a decadent desire for romance and adventure. In The Salzburg Tales and The Beauties and Furies, Stead continues her exploration of the motives behind her characters' adoption of an ideology, Marxist or otherwise. Oliver Fenton is clearly the culmination of this endeavour, displaying as he does the least worthy of motives for adopting an ideological stance - the desire to conceal his real, unattractive, self with a fashionable, romantic façade, with the intention of deceiving others, particularly unsophisticated women. As both of these books are to some extent exposures of the abuses of ideologies, neither of them projects an obviously Marxist-inspired view of the world.

In ^{this} respect, as in so many others, House of All Nations represents a considerable change of direction, namely a return to a clearly pro-Marxist outlook. It is infinitely more persuasive in this novel than in Seven Poor Men, however, as it is based on an immediate and not merely theoretical knowledge of the workings of capitalism.

Happily, the empiricism and psychological insight of the two preceding books are not sacrificed to polemical intention. Instead, they are used to give vividness and authenticity to the characterization, and easy polemical judgements on the novel's capitalists are avoided entirely. Marxist critics may deplore this lack of personal condemnation, but it is the view of this study that in its integration of an underlying Marxist analysis with an open-ness and responsiveness to human qualities - in its scrupulous honesty, in short - House of All Nations is a masterpiece of "littérature engagée" in the best sense of the term. The Man Who Loved Children and Cotters' England can also be considered as in their own ways, triumphs of "littérature engagée", although the last-named is the only one of the three that post-dates Sartre's creation of the term. This view of Stead's work has received endorsement from the author herself, in the interview referred to earlier.

Q. ... you have more or less had the political commitment of your husband most of your life, haven't you?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you think that has an important part in your writing:

A. Yes, I believe so. I believe that the view of the world (apart from my own views, of course) that was probably the structure for it.¹

The syntactical ambiguity of Stead's reply, whatever its cause, does not obscure her meaning. What she means by "the structure for it" is made somewhat clearer by her later disavowal of "political messages".

Q. You dislike political messages in writing?

A. What I feel is that if you believe a thing intensely it's in the book, you don't have to write slogans. I'm opposed to it. I know there are people who like to do it, so I'm not talking for them, that's their business, but I myself would feel uneasy, writing a political message for any given government, or anything like that. It's not the way I think, that's all. (my emphasis) ²

1. Interview in A.L.S., 239-40.

2. Ibid., 241.

These comments describe her practice remarkably accurately. The explicit "messages" of Seven Poor Men and The Beauties and Furies are conspicuously absent from all her subsequent novels, in which the need for such explicit formulations is obviated by the powerful underlying presence of the "things" that Stead "believes intensely". For this reason, the best of the later novels are both more persuasive and more successful aesthetically, embodying, as was suggested earlier, the greatest strengths of "littérature engagée".

In the same interview, Stead gave her endorsement to the view that House of All Nations is "a staggering satire of the capitalist system".¹ Although this description is not particularly illuminating as it stands, "satire" is a far better label than "indictment" as it draws attention to two of the most central qualities of the novel's vision - humour and irony. Irony is absolutely central to the novel, as it is the primary mode not only of presenting and understanding character, but also of presenting and understanding the novel's other main centre of interest - the Banque Mercure itself. It is through this ironic vision that the crucial structural link between the characters and the bank is established - "crucial" because without such a central unifying principle, this huge novel of 787 pages would be fatally lacking in aesthetic coherence. This skilful amalgamation of the novel's personal drama with its central ideological thrust is at the heart of its remarkable success. A peripheral but telling illustration of the pervasiveness of irony in the novel is provided by its very title. While its superficial reference is to the cosmopolitan nature of the bank's clientele, its more serious, ironic, reference is to a well-known Paris brothel which is mentioned twice in the body of the novel. The implicit equation of the bank with a brothel is perhaps deft rather than profound, but this touch is certainly representative of the novel's characteristic mode of presentation. In fact the disparagement of the bank implied by the title is somewhat at odds with the novel's overall attitude towards it, which is not simply one of moral outrage at its

1. Ibid., 238.

exploitation and dehumanization of people, but a profoundly ironic and dualistic one that embraces both a recognition of its beauty and its ugliness and an acute awareness of its essential insubstantiality and illusoriness. Stead encapsulated this latter recognition very well when she described the bank as "an exceptional place, because it was one man's fantasy" (my emphasis).¹

Stead's appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the bank seems to have led to a greater awareness of the ironies of personality and of personal relationships, and it is these areas that are the principal concern of the present study. This new maturity in her understanding of the world and of personality in particular is well revealed in her choice of epigraph for the novel.

On est ~~dé~~dommagé de la perte de son innocence par celle de ses préjugés. Dans la société des méchants, où le vice se montre à masque levé, on apprend à les connaître.

— Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau

Perhaps this should stand alongside the characters' statements presented on the next page, under the heading "Credo", as the "credo" of the author herself in writing the novel. The link between the author's vision of the bank and of her characters is touched on here by the metaphor of the mask, so closely related to that of the façade, which is central to the novel's presentation of the bank - "The façade is everything" as Jules declares ("Credo"). The bank constitutes a metaphor of personality that informs the characterization with considerable effect. In the case of Jules, its creator, the bank is directly analogous to his personality in many important respects. This is clearly a special case, however, and the metaphorical link between the bank and the other major characters is less direct, being based on the paradoxical and ironic nature that they have in common. That these ironies are often relevant to a study of ideology and character is illustrated by the important example of Michel Alphendéry - the novel's portrait of William Blake - who is in the incongruous situation of being employed by an

1. Ibid.

unscrupulously exploitative capitalist institution while being sincerely committed to a Marxist politico-economic analysis which calls for the destruction of such institutions.

The ensuing discussion of the novel will follow the order suggested by these preliminary observations; consideration of the illusory nature of the bank itself and of the many ironies of its operations, followed by consideration of the metaphorical nature of the bank, as a link with, and introduction to discussion of the ironic presentation of the major characters. Before this discussion begins, however, there are some important observations to be made regarding the author's approach to presentation in the novel. In broad terms, this novel represents a radical purging of many of the excesses of Stead's earlier work, in particular of the often damaging excursions into the fantastic, both conceptual and verbal. Further, the author has restricted narration to an absolute minimum in this novel, relying almost exclusively on dialogue as her means of presentation of character and action. The extended, vigorous exchanges of Withers and Chamberlain that comprised one of the successes of Seven Poor Men are taken up again and used in a much more sustained and dramatically effective way, as indeed the novel's dominant dramatic mode. Another important innovation is the use of a cinematic approach to the organization of scenes and incidents : the novel is divided into 104 "Scenes" of widely varying length, whose titles, incidentally, are usually significant in some way. This organizational technique is entirely appropriate, as the novel's dialogue-based style of presentation and vigorous pace of speech and action have, in fact, a combined effect that is well described as "cinematic". Overall, the novel's presentation of character is far more successful dramatically than it was in Stead's earlier work. The characters' voices are more consistently individuated and the author's distancing and control in relation to them is far better sustained. The dramatic strengths of the novel will be better indicated, however, by the more detailed discussion that follows.

As the title of the novel suggests, and its central dramatic action confirms, the Banque Mercure itself is the author's primary concern in House of All Nations. Of course the bank's principals, employees and clientele are all important components of it, and receive considerable attention in the novel. Indeed, one of the most important implications of the novel as a whole is that the Banque Mercure, and the capitalist system which to some degree it represents, is neither more substantial nor more secure than its sponsors, who are human beings, after all. The story of the Banque Mercure is an extreme, but nonetheless revealing illustration of the fragility of the capitalist system, because as a small private bank, owned by Jules Bertillon himself, it begins as and remains "one man's fantasy",¹ in Stead's words, and is subject to the whims of its mercurial creator, as its name suggests. In this part of the discussion, attention will be given to the ironies arising from the "fantastic" mode of existence of the bank : consideration of the ways in which it reveals the personality of its creator, Jules Bertillon, will follow later.

Perhaps it is appropriate, at the outset, to establish the nature of the façade that the bank projects to the world, and to its clients in particular. Furnished opulently but tastefully by Jules himself, with a courteous and obliging staff, the bank gives its affluent and stylish clientele the sort of treatment they would expect as guests in a wealthy friend's mansion, as the following passage indicates.

In the end booth stood darkly twinkling, like a sweet ferret, a debile, polished youth of dark complexion, François Vallat, the clients' secretary. He attended to the little personal wants of the customers without charge by the bank. He ran messages for them, got them opera seats, seats at the boxing matches, took their passports and identity cards to the préfecture, knew people in embassies who sent the long-winded identification papers through like lightning, gave advice about triptyques (automobile permits for the Continent), knew addresses, recommended restaurants, and in general gave the advice that a private secretary of Mr Bertillon would give to Mr Bertillon's friends. He was well dressed, sensitive, servile, and had perfect taste.

1. Ibid.

It had been noticed by Jules Bertillon that the more generous he was, the more his moneyed clients expected for nothing. Nevertheless, he loved the idea that his bank was sleek and that its servants were as perfect as those in a rich mansion of high respectability. And, in fact, the bank quietly breathed out his own air of teeming wealth.

(Scene Thirteen : "The Bank", p.108)

Of course the bank is only interested in people out of whom it can make a profit; the improvident artists who frequent the stock-exchange room in the hope of making a fortune by speculating in shares receive contemptuous treatment from Jules. This is one of the ugly facets of the bank, and the author reveals it effectively through Alphendéry, who denounces the degrading effects of the bank's operations to Jules, having exhorted the failed artists in the stock-exchange room to return to their creative work.

'Isn't this a terrible business we're in,' said Alphendéry, 'that drags writers away from their books, sends men insane, induces men to waste years of their lives in a stuffy room looking at figures, intent on gorging more and more and more money, until they've forgotten how to count, or what money is or comes from, until they don't even want what's bought with money - as, leisure, fine tailoring, good food and drink, round-seeing, books - but just want to sit there in the stock exchange year after year.... There are the Hallers, who are stuffed with money, coming in day after day. They're free, happy, have enough of everything in the world and could spend their lives traveling. But they sit every day all the year in the green armchairs in Jules's board room looking at rows of numbers changing, and when the market closes, they go home to sleep. There is nothing else to do - in Paris, the bull's-eye of desire - until the markets open again the next day. It's an insane asylum you run, Jules. I can't stand it: how can you?'

(Scene Thirty-four: "Five Cents and the Million Dollars", pp.233-4)

A Marxist friend of Alphendéry's, Adam Constant, who is also employed in the bank, gives a much longer and more powerful denunciation of the bank in Scene Eight, appropriately entitled "J'accuse". His plan to write an exposé of its operations has been taken as an outline of Stead's motives in writing the novel, but, as was observed earlier, the novel's overall response to the bank is not simply one of

Marxist-inspired moral outrage, but is far more complex than that. Basic to it is the recognition that the bank, despite the reality of its physical existence and of its good and bad effects on people, is itself essentially insubstantial and evanescent. It is this realization, and its ironic and humorous implications that dominate Stead's perception of the bank, and strongly influence her presentation of character in this novel. The author's view of the bank gains enormously in persuasiveness by being shown to be accurate and not just asserted. Rather in the way that the bourgeois conception of romance is shown to be illusory by the main action of The Beauties and Furies, so in House of All Nations the bank is shown to be fragile by the central dramatic action. In fact it is destroyed almost inadvertently by the appropriately named Raccamond in the course of his attempts to gain possession of it. Needless to say, the irony and "poetic justice" of this are appreciated by the author, and persuasively conveyed to the reader.

It is Raccamond's fatal error that he is deceived by the surface appearance of the bank. Of course the characters who are involved with the bank's real livelihood - speculative operations - are fully aware of the deceptive nature of its public face. Henri Léon, who is introduced to the bank by Raccamond, immediately senses this on his first visit:

He looked around. 'Beautiful : he has taste : it's the finest bank in Paris, and little - you could hold it in the hollow of your hand. A hollow jewel. Perhaps not hollow, eh?'

(Scene Two, "A Check Technique", p.23).

Léon is trying to draw Alphendéry on the bank's resources here, certainly, but his phrase "a hollow jewel" arises from his shrewd distrust of appearances, which is in stark contrast with the greedy credulousness of Raccamond, so reminiscent of Sir Epicure Mammon, who was ultimately undeceived just as painfully. Jules Bertillon's observations on the importance of appearances in creating confidence in the bank have quite obvious Jonsonian echoes.

It's easy to make money. You put up the sign BANK and someone walks in and hands you his money. The façade is everything.

("Credo")

'Sure,' said Jules. 'You must have decent people around you: a bank is a confidence trick. If you put up the right signs, the wizards of finance themselves will come in and ask you to take their money. Show a man a marble column or Etienne's soft brown eyes and he goes frantic and sheds money for you: the way he sheds blood for you if you wave a flag.... Did you ever think, Michel, that even a pirate or a gangster puts his money in a bank? They stick up one bank and put the money in another. They wouldn't be a bank clerk to save their lives, but they give their money to one. That's the mystery ... Lord, What nitwits!' His whole peal of bells rang out. 'All suckers - even me.'

(Scene Fourteen: "The Collection",
p.115)

Even the Jonsonian analogy of the theatre is echoed in the following statement.

Jules grinned, 'This isn't a bank : there's a sign outside saying BANK and when they see it they come inside and drop their cash on the counter. If I put up the sign BARBER they'd come in just as automatically looking for a shave. It's all in the sign. This is a stage I've set and filled with supers for the great act of Jules Bertillon, multimillionaire, and when the climax comes, I ring down the curtain. In the meantime, they pay to see the show.'

(Scene Thirty-seven: "Spring Fever",
p.251)

Of course Jules's point of view is that of the deceiver - self-congratulatory, cynical, arrogant. A more comprehensive view of the illusory nature of the bank is that expressed in the following passage by Alphendéry, the novel's most reliable observer. He is conscious of the cruelty of the deception imposed on the bank's employees, and aware of the absurdity of Raccamond's strenuous efforts to gain control of the bank, but recognizes, above all, the essential unreality of the bank.

'Of course. The terror of it! Don't forget there is this bank, which is Jules's, and that of the employees, to whom it represents not only the old order, a stable financial system, the basis of the centre-left, republican, catholic or socialist politics they go in for. It also represents their home, hopes of marriage, children,

summer holidays, life insurance, old father's kitchen garden, medical expenses, everything in life. They take it very seriously. They must. They read the newspapers, particularly any news affecting banks and banking, and imagine that they have penetrated it more easily, due to their experience in Bertillon Frères. They are getting on in life. They are "well-placed." And this bank is nonexistent : it is nothing! I has no purpose. It is a privateer's fantasy : here today and gone tomorrow. Oh, God, it frightens me! Look at Raccamond struggling the way he does, trying to oust William and me, jealous of Mouradzian, treading on the corns of the lesser employees, flattering the clients, running himself to death, being egged on by his ambitious shrew-wife, hoping to cover up all the muddy steps of his early career. Look at Betty, my cousin; at this poor Cancre, at Légaré - the lot of them, believing in an illusion, spending their lives round it. A fantasy in the brain of an ignorant, a flighty, self-centred freak. How unreal, Jean, is this whole world I struggle in and get my gray hairs in!'

(Scene Eighty: "Measure of Brains",
p.629)

Even when it is in operation the bank is insubstantial in important respects. It engages in "contre-partie" dealings on the stock exchange - in effect, gambling with the clients' money - so that the records of transactions are in a chaotic state, and the bank's overall position is more a matter of conjecture than of calculation. Of course it is only when the bank suddenly closes, and the Bertillon family disappears, that its utter insubstantiality is revealed to the employees and the clients. As the following passage reveals, there is even confusion at this point about the name of the bank, the identity of its manager and the sources of its capital.

No one knew anything, and the poor employees stood around in consternation like a family of fowls when an airplane passes overhead. It was discovered that no one knew anything about the bank. What was its name? Everyone called it the Banque Bertillon. It had a plate which said BERTILLON FRÈRES, but it was really the Banque Mercure, S.A. Some said the general manager was William Bertillon, some said Alphendéry, some Aristide Raccamond, some Jacques Manray, and one even said Urbain Voulou. As to the money behind the bank, some said it was Claire-Josèphe's, some said Jules's, and others thought that there was

big anonymous money behind it, while others inclined to the idea that it was nothing but a branch of Legris and Company of Amsterdam.

(Scene One Hundred and One: "Post Mortem", pp.760-61)

The full truth of Alphendéry's observation that to its employees the bank represents "'everything in life'" now becomes clear through their complete disorientation; the fact that they never took the trouble to ascertain the administrative and financial basis of its operations indicates just how implicit their faith in the bank, and in Jules, really was. The reader himself cannot avoid identifying with them to some extent. Alphendéry's observation that the bank represents "'everything in life'" can be equally applied to many people in our own bourgeois society, as recent outbreaks of panic among the clients of building societies indicate. It is to be hoped that an Australian re-issue of House of All Nations will not give rise to a "run" on our banks!

As earlier discussion suggested, the Banque Mercure is far from solid even while its banking operations continue. As later discussion will reveal, Jules Bertillon regarded it almost as a toy, to be dispensed with when it ceased to amuse him. At this point, however, it is important to establish that the bank was deceptive not only in that it projected an appearance of solidity and dynastic wealth, but also, and perhaps more importantly in terms of the novel's ideological content, in that the normal banking operations were no more than a cover for its large scale speculative operations in currencies and on the stock market, in which a client's funds are lost and won again in the course of a week with a truly cavalier disregard for his security. That Jules had a contemptuous regard for his clientele - as "'suckers'" - has already been demonstrated by quotation. A vitally important implication of this is that the men at the centre of the bank's operations - representative to some degree of all of the top echelon of the capitalist system - have a cynical and amoral view of the world that would be profoundly shocking to its bourgeois clientele, to whom both money and morality are sacrosanct. In a way that is closely analogous to that

employed in The Beauties and Furies, this novel exposes as an illusion and a myth one of the central assumptions of bourgeois society, namely that making money is an ennobling and honourable activity undertaken by men of immense expertise who are concerned not only with personal profit but also with the welfare of society as a whole. Once again, the novel's point is made convincing by being demonstrated by the dramatic action, in this case through the figure of Raccamond.

Raccamond will not be discussed at length in this study, but some discussion of him is essential in the present context. To put it in the proper perspective, however, some consideration must be given to the nature of the world-view of the central characters, who are themselves involved in large-scale speculation of various kinds. A very convenient guide to their outlook is provided by the collection of aphoristic statements that precedes the text of the novel, under the appropriate heading of "Credo". By presenting these statements in this way, Stead reveals more than just her familiar delight in aphoristic formulation. More importantly, she reveals a desire to emphasize the discoveries that she has made about the characteristic outlook of this most extreme species of capitalist - the speculator - by presenting them to the reader in the most forceful way that she can. Each one of these statements encapsulates quite memorably some aspect of this common outlook; only those that bear on the contrasts between bourgeois morality and the speculator's amorality will be reproduced here.

There's no money in working for a living

— Jules Bertillon

Of course, there's a different law for the rich and the poor : otherwise, who would go into business?

— E. Ralph Stewart

The only permanent investment now is in disaster.

— Michel Alphendéry

There are poor men in this country who cannot be bought : the day I found that out, I sent my gold abroad.

— Comtesse deVoigrand

It's easy to make money. You put up the sign BANK and someone walks in and hand you his money. The façade is everything.

— Jules Bertillon

Everyone says he is in banking, grain or peanuts, but he's really in a dairy.

— Henri Léon

Patriotism pays if you take interest in other countries.

— Dr Jacques Carrière
("Credo")

A relevant historical factor, touched on by Michel Alphëndéry's statement, is the "crash" mentality that pervaded capitalism in the early thirties. Of course, Alphendéry has ideological reasons for hoping for further "disaster", but Jules shares his pessimistic prognosis for capitalism and would fully endorse this statement. Jules makes all his big speculative coups by predicting disasters, be they currency devaluations or company collapses. This is another of the ironies of the bank's operations. Alphendéry's statement sums it up very well.

Raccamond, a stranger to this amoral world, is deceived by the bank's opulent exterior, and sees it as a secure and stable institution - a likely place in which to make his career. Perhaps Stead's own views on Raccamond are illuminating here. She points out that he is "a parasite" not only in his relations with the bank but also in his relations with other people.¹ Certainly he derives what determination and courage he has from his wife, as Alphendéry observed in the passage quoted earlier. Indeed that passage succinctly sums up Raccamond's activities in much of the novel - up to the crisis point where he tries to gain joint control of the bank - and parts of it are worth reproducing in this context.

'Look at Raccamond struggling the way he does, trying to oust William and me, jealous of Mouradzian, treading on the corns of the lesser employees, flattering the clients, running himself to death, being egged on by his ambitious shrew-wife, hoping to cover up all the muddy steps of his early career. Look at Betty, my cousin; at this poor Cancre, at Légaré - the lot of them, believing in an illusion, spending their lives round it.'

(Scene Eighty: "Measure of Brains",
p.629)

1. In a recent conversation with the author.

The full irony of Raccamond's position, neatly stated a few pages later as "sailing to prosperity in a death ship", is soon to be brought home on the reader, if not on Raccamond himself. Indeed it should already have been clear to him at this point that he is in a world that he does not understand, but he is too obtuse to recognise it. His response to the disregard for the financial proprieties shown by Jules and Alphendéry is one of utter confusion.

Surrounded by such recklessness and such incomprehension, Aristide suddenly found his stature : either he was the only real 'banker' amongst them, or else the world he had been struggling to get into was chaos, or else he had once more landed on one of those rotten houses whose bottom would fall out overnight. Poor Aristide, sailing to prosperity on a death ship.

(Scene Eighty-one: "Shadows"pp.631-2)

Raccamond's words and actions abound in ironies, and these become more and more apparent after he takes the bold step - acting on Marianne's instructions - of stealing the records of transactions from the bank's Brussels branch. These reveal that the bank is involved in the unethical but not illegal practice of taking stock exchange positions against its clients - hence the term "contre-partie". Although he entertained suspicions that the bank was involved in such dealings, Raccamond is staggered by the proof that he finds in these books; so much so that what little judgement he possessed up to this point completely disappears, with the result that he ruins his ambitious scheme by demanding too much of Jules. Indeed, in response to his very first set of demands Jules points out very forcefully that he is not the sort of man that can be successfully blackmailed, and that he would rather close the bank than accede to his demands. Instead of accepting this as the truth, however, and thereby avoiding months of constant anxiety, Raccamond responds in his most characteristic, and, as will soon be revealed, most ironic way, by adopting a pose of moral outrage. Having dismissed his demands as "'pure fantasy'" Jules adopts a more aggressive approach in the hope of putting an end to his demands:

'And I won't have a partner,' said Jules getting irritable. 'This is my bank. I run it. No busybodies. I'd rather shut it up. Ask something reasonable or I close the bank. You don't mean a thing to me! Your blackmailing doesn't touch me because I don't give a damn. Who says I have to keep in business? When I close the bank tonight I can pay off the boys and say, Don't come back tomorrow. Who can stop me?'

Aristide sagged. 'You can't do that.'

'Can't I? You don't think I see all my clients holding their assets abroad and that I keep mine here!'

Then Aristide said, 'I see what it is : you gentlemen have decided to cheat me out of my prospects, my clients, and my money, and you came here this morning to fool me out of the agreement you promised me. You said you'd make me a partner and now you won't do anything. You force me to go to the police. You're all rogues.'

(Scene Eighty-nine: "A Solution", p.681)

As Raccamond's response of childish indignation suggests, his demands have only just begun.

Ultimately Raccamond does make some progress. Jules later weakens under the strain of constant harassment, and makes some concessions. Raccamond's victories are hollow, however, because when he finally carries out his threat to bring in the police, they take no action, and he is dismissed from the bank. Moreover, so serious has been the decline of Jules's morale, as a result of Raccamond's relentless pressure, that he closes the bank, as he said he would, and flees the country with his clients' funds.

The most obvious irony of Raccamond's career is that he is "sailing to prosperity on a death ship", as the narrator expresses it. No less important, however, is the irony in the fact that his ambitious scheme, despite its initial misjudgement of the nature of the bank, could have had more substantial success if it had been executed by a man who was not blinded by his bourgeois assumptions, and so better able to face the truth about the bank as it unfolded. This points to the inner irony, and perhaps the most profound point of Raccamond's story, namely that he is a naïve bourgeois trying to grapple with a world that he does not begin to understand, a world that sets his bourgeois values at naught. His response to this amoral world is to reassert

most fervently his bourgeois conception of morality. As the reader is well aware, however, this moralistic pose is a singularly hollow and incongruous one, as reservations were expressed about his own moral probity when the bank first employed him - his reputation as pander to "the vices of the rich" preceded him (Scene Two: "A Check Technique", p.27). A further irony - one that is inherent in bourgeois values, perhaps - lies in the fact that despite his ostensible concern for the welfare of the clients, his only real concern is his own material and social progress. It is this, above all, that makes his accusations of immorality against Jules, and his own claims to moral purity ring so hollow.

It is a measure of the advances made in Stead's presentation of character that the reader's final feelings towards Raccamond are not, however, merely ones of hostility or contempt. The author imaginatively enters into the anxiety, even agony, of mind that Raccamond goes through during his long and fruitless struggle to gain control of the bank. This is nowhere more apparent than in the following passage, which comes at the point when Raccamond finally takes decisive action to put an end to the months of uncertainty and anxiety that he has brought upon himself. This action - advising one of his prestigious clients to withdraw her account from the bank - brings Raccamond his "first real victory". His feelings of satisfaction are short-lived, however, and confusion verging on panic soon takes their place. The "monstrous" knowledge that he has been brooding over for months - his knowledge of the bank's contre-partie operations - has obviously undermined his sanity.

This first real victory excited Aristide beyond measure. He followed the lady back to the bank, made sure that she was upstairs, and while he was there heard Jacques Manray answer the telephone: 'Mme. de Sluys-Forêt. Yes, I'll send you what she has on the books still, as soon as I get a moment. O.K. I'll ask Henri Martin.' Aristide, justified, flew into an ecstasy of terror and self-righteousness. He laid his hand on Mouradzian's arm and dragged him out of the doorway in which he was standing watching the course of the market.

'Mr. Mouradzian, come with me quickly. I must speak to you. I have something monstrous,

to reveal to you. Not here! Not here!'

At his air, Mouradzian was frightened.
'What is it?'

'Not here, not here, come to the Bar
Florence with me.'

At this moment a client called Mouradzian,
and he could only whisper, 'If it's serious,
later in the Cinzano Bar. I'll be down that way,
say, twenty minutes.'

Aristide looked round. He suddenly thought,
'If I tell Mouradzian all now, he'll withdraw all
his people, and mine will be ruined. I won't get
my money.' He had thought this many times before;
but he had no sequence in his motives: he thought
of things, forgot them, remembered them in night-
mares, forgot them in excitement, remembered them
in an off hour and forgot them again, because he
lived in too many torments! What a life! Not a
life for him. And all to make a miserable living -
for he was crushed with debts. And on top of all
this, he had to protect the clients, some of them
millionaires, some of them making easy money
chirping in public or pulling long faces on the
screen. He was crazy to bother about others the
way he did: who thanked him for it? The other
men were calm enough.

(Scene Seventy-nine: "Man of Destiny",
pp.729-30)

The title of this scene is of course ironic, but the irony
intended is surely mild, even benign. Aristide is reduced
to a pathetic, clown-like figure at this point, and the
reader is probably less conscious of Raccamond's failings
than he is of the cruel irony of the circumstances that put
such a weak and indecisive man in the role of a "man of
destiny".

As the unhappy career of Raccamond illustrates, the
Banque Mercure is a prize that the uninitiated bourgeois
pursues at his own peril. Like the will-o'-the-wisp itself,
it leads through swamps and quicksands, but cannot, finally,
be won.

One of the most persuasive indications that House of All Nations is more than a Marxist-oriented indictment of the capitalist system is provided by the novel's presentation of Raccamond; he destroys the Banque Mercure, but far from being the novel's hero, he is close to being its villain. Indeed he, and his wife Marianne, are the only major characters against whom the author shows any of the hostility that she showed for Oliver Fenton in The Beauties and Furies. The presentation of Oliver is relevant here, as it points to some of the reasons why Raccamond is presented as, on the whole, an unsympathetic figure; firstly, because he is, like Oliver, a naïve bourgeois, with little grasp of immediate reality, and secondly, because, as a consequence of this, he is profoundly and incorrigibly a hypocrite, unable to recognize the sharp disjunction between his words and his deeds. As was observed earlier in relation to Jules, at least he is honest about his motivations and makes no attempt to present them to others, or to himself, as virtuous. This honesty is common to all the other major characters - William, Henri Léon, Alphendéry - and it is clear that Stead regards it as attractive in itself. Nevertheless, just as the abiding presence of the "unreal" bank leads the reader to suspect, none of these characters is straightforward or transparent. All of them are shot through with ironies, incongruities, and self-deceptions of various kinds. The figures of Jules and Alphendéry are particularly rich in such complexities, and the close relationship between them reflects these and generates complexities of its own. Accordingly, this discussion will concentrate on these two characters, and conclude with some consideration of the relationship between them.

It was suggested earlier that the Banque Mercure is a metaphor of Jules Bertillon's personality. Perhaps it is more accurate, however, to describe it as an expression of his personality, because, as both Alphendéry and Stead herself have pointed out, the bank is essentially a "fantasy" created by Jules, and Jules alone. Indeed one cannot avoid the suspicion in reading the novel that Stead sees the bank as just as much a work of the imagination as

the creations that are called "art", and that she sees Jules as a creative artist in his own way. Of course it would be futile to try to make the analogy complete, because, as will be revealed, Jules's relationship with the bank has some very different overtones as well, but there can be little doubt that the author perceives, and values this aspect of the bank and effectively makes the reader aware of it. The presentation of Raccamond once again provides supporting evidence. The novel's hostility towards him appears to be based to some extent on the crucial role that he plays in the destruction of the Banque Mercure; his very name emphasizes his capacity as a "wrecker", and is a strong indication of this.

The complexities of Jules's relationship with his "fantasy", the Banque Mercure, are well revealed in the following extensive analysis by Alphendéry. The artist-work-of-art overtones of the relationship are not emphasized here, but are suggested by the emphasis on the beauty of the bank that emerges towards the end. Alphendéry is trying to dissuade Jules from closing the bank.

'You've built a hothouse here to force your fantasies in. They'll parch outside. No one will care for them. They'll grow twisted, leaves will turn into flowers, stalks will broaden into leaves, potatoes will grow on stalks, peanuts will hang from calyces, the world will be monstrous and topsy-turvy, you'll gamble, be spendthrift, melt your money down in liquor, cover women with it, your happy marriage will be broken, your children will drift away from you, your brothers will desert you, no one will care for you : because you are without a function. And you can only work with this machine you have built. You don't know how to dawdle, Jules, if there is no bank waiting for you to come back to. You can only enjoy yourself now on the Côte d'Azur, at Le Touquet, because the bank is here to shape your fantasies to. I know you so well, Jules. Don't give up this solid universe : don't float back into the air. Your feet are winged : unless you chain yourself by a golden chain to something on earth, you will join the worthless, fleshless creatures who float round our enterprises, our tenements of commerce, trying to get in. I know you : you don't exist apart from your bank, just the same as it would decay, until one could put his fist through the walls, if you were to leave it. Someone might buy it up, true, but it would not be this bank, this strange palace of illusion, temptation, and beauty. The

beauty of this place is you, Jules. Its soul is you. And you are it. Don't leave it.'

(Scene Twenty-six: "No Money in Working for a Living", p.198)

The interpretation that dominates this analysis - that Jules is himself insubstantial and needs the "'solid universe'" of the bank, that there is a soul-body relationship between him and his bank - is one that recurs throughout the novel. It is most often suggested by the identification of Jules with the Roman god of commerce, Mercury - touched on here, of course, by the words "'Your feet are winged'". The identification is a remarkably appropriate one, as Jules shares not only this insubstantiality with Mercury, but also an association with money-making and gambling, and, most importantly perhaps, a combination of an irresistible personal charm with inner unscrupulousness and cunning. It is this latter combination of qualities that points to the central link between Jules's and the bank : they are closely analogous in having a stylish, attractive, charming exterior concealing the inner reality of cynicism and unscrupulousness, where the only value recognized is monetary value.

While this is the essential metaphorical link between Jules and the bank, and while Jules himself obviously favours the analogy, as his cynical comments about the importance of the "façade" indicate, the analogy itself, while true as far as it goes, represents much less than the whole truth about Jules. As is hardly surprising in a novel in which irony is so pervasive, Jules's "inner reality of cynicism and unscrupulousness" is itself just another mask. While his charming exterior is useful to him as a means of gaining the confidence of his clients, this inner mask is the one that he wears in the private discussions with William, Alphendéry and Léon that make up so much of the novel. It also represents Jules's own self-concept, and in this capacity it is indispensable as a means of sustaining his morale and momentum, particularly when these are being undermined by Alphendéry. One of the best examples of Jules's use of this rather flattering self-concept to bolster up his confidence comes, rather paradoxically, at a point where Alphendéry is trying to persuade him to keep the bank in

operation. In fact Jules is merely passing through one of his regular phases of frustration with the bank, in which he sees it as an impediment to making "'big money'" rather than an aid. His enormous conceit is strongly in evidence here.

'I'm not an old maid playing patience. I want big money and what have I got round me? Savers, hoarders, go-gentlies, abacus gentry back in the carpetbags of the Middle Ages, squirrels, ants, census takers, penny-bank campaigners - installment-plan robbers, shilling-a-week shortchangers, Saturday tillshakers, busfare embezzlers, dime defalcators - you're as bad as Etienne. You're honest. It's no good hiding it. All your philosophy hasn't got you farther than scraping and pinching like the knifegrinder's wife. If you start little, you remain little. If you start with bells on, you end with bells on. I know what I want. I only want to hear from you how it's to be done. You're my technical expert, Michel. I employ you for that. Go to Maître Lemaître or Beaubien and find out how to do it. That's all I'm asking you.'

(Scene Twenty-six: "No Money in Working for a Living", p.201)

Jules is at his best here, at least in terms of his own self-concept, and this passage is representative of scores of arrogant and cynical, but nonetheless dramatically powerful statements made by him in the course of the novel.

Why then postulate an "inner Jules" at all? For much of the novel, certainly, the reader sees very little evidence in Jules's behaviour for the existence of an inner self. That there are undercurrents of a different, private self even in Jules's prosperity will become clear when the relationship between him and Michel Alphëndery is discussed, later. Explicit evidence there is, however, firstly in Alphëndery's analyses of Jules's personality, and secondly, and more directly, in the complete collapse of Jules's morale in the latter stages of the novel, where his earlier confidence and aggression are replaced by despair and indifference to his fate. In fact the reader is made aware through authorial comment very early in the novel that Jules's will is less than robust.

He was brave, full of go and gaiety but he was frail. His will was short-breathed and he was volatile.

(Scene Nine: "Jules Bertillon", p.88)

The state that Jules later lapses into under the pressure imposed on him by Carrière and Raccamond is perhaps less an expression of his "inner" self than something approaching what Lawrence calls an "allotropic state" of his personality - the necessary, inherent obverse of the ebullient Jules of the earlier parts of the novel. Unlike Alphendéry, he has no permanent, irreducible values or beliefs to support him in times of adversity. In fact he is utterly prostrated by adversity, as the following passage shows. Jacques Carrière, friend and former sponsor of Raccamond, has come to collect the huge sum of money that Jules has lost to him through an ill-advised bet on the value of sterling. Jules merely watches, apparently detached and indifferent, as Raccamond takes command of the situation, for once, and ensures that the money is paid.

Aristide said, 'Sit there, Dr. Carrière, you'll get the money. I'll go and get the manager, Mr. William : he'll pay you immediately. Everything will be in order. I'll take it on myself to see that you are paid.' Jules sat there as if he had fallen asleep or fainted. Only a faint chagrin showed on his thin face. Aristide ran out to fetch William. The three sat there, without looking at each other, waiting. Jules felt as if the slightest move would bring him disaster. Carrière savored the bizarre moment.

William came in hurriedly. 'What are you doing, Jules?'

'I am taking care of this, Mr. William,' said Aristide. 'I'm trying to do the best for both, but Dr. Carrière must be paid. Otherwise he will close the bank.'

William looked grimly, but hopelessly at them all. Jules's voice was heard clear and faint, 'Pay him, William.'

'Three hundred thousand francs?' William said angrily.

'Whatever he wants.'

(Scene Ninety-two: "Carrière", p.701-2)

As Alphendéry's lengthy analysis of Jules merely confirms what has already been established by discussion and quotation, it is not necessary to reproduce it here (Scene Ninety-eight: "Interlude", p.750). A more appropriate passage for inclusion here - one that touches on the strange relationship between Jules and Alphendéry - is the following. Jules is in the same state of moral collapse as he was in the previous extract.

He and Michel are estranged, and although he may only be "seizing on every straw", as the narrator suggests, the full extent of his former dependence on Alphendéry for support becomes clear, as does his obsessive adherence to a one-dimensional value system based on money. The pathetic irony of Jules's plan to get him back is that Alphendéry is the person least likely to be moved by monetary enticements.

'That's it. Why didn't we send for him before? What's he doing away? Tell him to come back immediately. Let him fight for me : I gave him lots of money. I gave him all the money he has; tell him I want him. He'll come.'

'He mightn't,' said William who didn't want to complicate things again. 'You were pretty crude with him.'

Jules began laughing foolishly, almost crying. 'He'll come back for me. He loves me. He told me he'd do anything for me. He's well off through me. Send for him; he's my friend. He's my only friend. He wouldn't have made any bargains with Raccamond. He wouldn't have sent Bomba to London the way you people did.'

William shrugged silently. Jules continued, 'He is the only one that cares for me. What's he doing away? Tell him we'll give him six month's pay at once. Tell him I'm terribly sick and I can't do anything : I need him. Well!' he cried angrily to William, 'why don't you do it?'

William wrote.

Alphendéry did not return.

(Scene Ninety-three: "Restitution",
pp.709-10)

As he should have known, a simple appeal for support and companionship in this crisis would have served Jules far better. This is just one of the incongruities of the relationship between Jules and Michel - the most dramatically engrossing relationship of the novel.

Michel Alphendéry is, as a portrait of Stead's husband William Blake, a special character like Baruch, and, to a lesser extent, Marpurgo before him. Although the author succeeds in distancing herself from him properly, and is fully aware of the invidiousness of his position, his is still an authoritative voice. The sharp irony of Alphendéry's position, which this discussion will soon consider, seems to have been the germ from which the whole vision of the novel developed. The ambivalence of the novel's attitude

towards the Banque Mercure and the irony that pervades its presentation of character and action seem to be the outcome of an artistic extension, elaboration and structuring by Stead of the ironies and incongruities of the real-life situation of William Blake as a Marxist intellectual employed by a Paris bank.¹

It is hardly surprising that Alphendéry is reminiscent in many respects of Baruch Mendelssohn. The most obvious of their shared qualities is a delight in and mastery of exposition. This aspect of Alphendéry is made obvious very early in House of All Nations when he undertakes the task of explaining one of Léon's schemes to Jules. Characteristically, Léon "poured out a confusion of ideas" to Jules, who, in blank incomprehension, calls on Michel to elucidate it. Baruch is immediately recalled to the reader's mind when he reads "Alphendéry leaned forward, his eyes glossy with his personal passion, exposition" (Scene Two: "A Check Technique", p.20). This particular situation recurs throughout the novel, most memorably perhaps when Léon proposes to Jules, through Michel, his brilliant wheat marketing scheme (Scene Fifty-three: "The Wheat Scheme"). The remarkable rapport between Léon and Michel that these scenes reveal provides an obvious and convincing basis for the partnership that they later establish, when Michel leaves the Banque Mercure.

Alphendéry's skill in the exposition of his own ideas has already been illustrated, most effectively perhaps by his analysis of the essential unreality of the bank itself (Scene Eighty: "Measure of Brains", p.629). This whole passage, and its last sentence in particular, - "'How unreal, Jean, is this whole world I struggle in and get my grey hairs in!'" - reveal some of the incongruity of Alphendéry's situation, and the further incongruity of the fact that he is acutely aware of it. The most prominent contradiction involved in his position is, however, an ideological rather than a metaphysical one. As a Marxist, he wants the capitalist system destroyed, and he insists on

1. Interview in A.L.S., 238.

the absolute sincerity of this wish when the English banker Ralph Stewart tries to dilute it out of existence.

'You're quite a socialist, aren't you, Alphendéry?'

'I favour socialist organisation,' said Michel.

Stewart bit his lip. 'You mean, Alphendéry, business should be organised. I quite agree. Fishermen —'

'Don't tell me what I mean, Ralph,' cried Alphendéry. 'I mean a revolution to wipe us all out, all of us who scrounge on others and ravage the wealth of the world - you, and Jules Bertillon and me. We must all go.'

(Scene Forty-six: "Friend of the King", p.328)

While there is a disarming honesty in his inclusion of himself among the guilty ones who should be "wiped out", the underlying ideological contradiction of his position is not allayed thereby. In fairness to Alphendéry it must be admitted that he is acutely conscious of the ideological and moral invidiousness of his position, and the fact that this awareness gives rise to considerable anguish and soul-searching is revealed by the painful reflections that are aroused in him by the ostentatious opulence of the bank's furnishings -

The more Michel looked at these façades, fine furnishings, crystal panes, brass rods, chased mirrors, carved frames, and soft carpets, the more depressed he became; the more was he convinced that he had to leave the bank and find another job. This came not only from his natural penchant for simplicity but also from a constant guilty picture in his mind's eye : a ganger sweating on the permanent way and the subtitle 'these stones, grilles, mahoganies came that way.' It was too much : it was too good.

(Scene Sixty-six: "Façade", p.530)

The author pointedly juxtaposes Michel's response with that of Raccamond, to whom all the finery represents "only the just reward of a good hard-working breed"!

Although the tensions involved in Alphendéry's position are touched on, both through authorial analysis and private self-communings, and although several attempts to account for his position are made, both by the author and by Alphendéry himself, it must be conceded that the presentation of this problematic area is less than profound, if not

inadequate to the demands of the novel. This is largely a result of the limits of the novel's distinctive, and generally successful, approach to the presentation of character. This is unsuited, as the analogy of the cinema perhaps suggests, to the presentation of the inner, psychological, drama. Of course, Alphendéry's status as an authoritative figure also contributes to the problem. It would be very wrong to insist, however, that the success of the novel's overall dramatic presentation is vitiated by this lack of psychological depth. After all, Alphendéry's incongruous position is one of the central *données* of the novel, and is arguably the core of its ironic vision. In any case, while the psychological drama is not satisfactorily presented directly, the outer drama to a large extent reveals, by implication, the changing balance of Alphendéry's conflicting impulses, as later discussion will attempt to show.

Further consideration of the precise nature of Alphendéry's problematic situation is necessary at this point, however. Of all the accounts given of why he remains in the bank, the following is probably the most succinct.

When would his slavery come to an end? He was bound to the bank by money needs and affection for the Bertillons, as well as inertia.

(Scene Thirty-three: "Mamma",
p.230)

By avoiding Alphendéry's tendency to rationalize, the narrator arrives at a more truthful assessment of his motivations. Dramatically, his "affection for the Bertillons" is the most important of these; consideration of the relationship between Michel and the Bertillon brothers is essential then to an understanding of his position. A surprising amount of light is thrown on his dilemma, however, by asking not "why does he stay?" but "why does he not join the proletariat in their struggle to overthrow capitalism?" Of course, Michel gives a lecture to a group of socialist workers, but, as he realises himself, he is still far from being one of them. He is impressed by the courage of the men, and feels obliged to confess that he "used to despise people who went to night schools as

piddlers, dreamers'" (Scene Seventy-seven: "A Changed Man", p.616).

The feeling that he is irrevocably an outsider afflicts him whenever he joins the social circle of his friends Jean Frère and Adam Constant, making these occasions somewhat less than satisfying for him. When he spends the weekend at Jean Frère's house in the country, for example, he is horrified by the sight of a large mass of voracious caterpillars denuding a bush - "They confirmed his worst suspicions about the country". Walking alone, he envisages the enjoyment that the others are probably sharing - "probably at this moment they were indulging in that raw laughter that degraded even the finest men, even communists, in the country". There is superb irony in the effusiveness that he feigns immediately after these dismal reflections - "He met Adam and said, 'I begin to understand fellow feeling here, because there is nothing between me and the earth'" (Scene Seven: "Jean Frère's Garden", p.75). Paradoxically he is more at liberty to express his feelings honestly in the bank, among the capitalists!

This is by no means a trivial observation - in fact it points to the root cause of Alphendéry's dilemma : he is ideally suited by social background and training to his job in the bank, but is driven by his ideological commitment, which is no less an essential part of his personality, to despise his job and the bank itself because of the ethos of "'grab and graft'" that they represent (Jules's words. Scene Twenty-six: "No Money in Working for a Living", p.199). Conversely, as the previous quotations indicated, Alphendéry is disqualified by his social background from ever becoming a true member of either the peasantry or the urban proletariat. This aspect of his situation is revealed quite poignantly in the following passage. He is at Jean Frère's house in Paris with some of Jean's friends, when they begin singing popular songs. His feelings of otherness are intensified by this, and he reflects on the contrasting milieu of "high culture" in which he was raised. This passage is an exception to the strictures placed on the novel's direct presentation of psychological processes, and as it encapsulates

this important aspect of Alphendéry's situation so well, it is worthy of inclusion here in full.

Alphendéry spent the time falling deeper in love with Jean Frère and conscientiously picking out grains of pedantry in himself, for he had been brought up to sing (in his flawed and untrained voice) themes from Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, and Mozart. In fact, he never allowed himself to hum, even to himself, any popular tunes - strange results of having Dutch uncles! But Jean and Charles Lorée went on singing away in their two beautiful and blended voices and Jean urged softly once or twice, as he drew breath, 'Sing, sing.' Alphendéry sat there turning large, soft, defenseless, black eyes on the outlines of things in the dark. He was not used to sitting in the dark : he always sat in the brightest lights possible and thought and talked in the most brilliant manner possible. It unnerved him to sit with the 'great people's leader' Jean Frère and the 'famous physicist' Charles Lorée in the dark and hear them singing 'Old Man River'. His world swiftly dissolved and slowly rose up again from cells.

At home, they had sing-songs, when he was a boy, but they were the great themes from 'the great masters,' trumpeted, droned, double-bassed, celloed in his uncles' great Rhineland pipes; there were orchestration, and conductor, and the devil to pay if you went out of tune or forgot the score. It was not really singing : it was a concert under an iron conductor, with the regulation jokes at certain passages, and three or four or even a crowd of passers-by listening intently outside the window. And bright lights, Heine, Goethe, Racine, Corneille, Molière, Shakespeare, Pushkin on the library shelves, works of philosophy and medicine and endless coffee and apple cake. If Michel had at that time ever forgotten himself and fallen into 'Ecco ridente' he would have had a lecture on culture beginning with Alaric (at the latest) and ending with barbarians yet unconceived even of fascist poets..... So there he sat and thought of the great lover of culture he was and the great oddity he appeared in the company of Jean and Charles and Adam, and he sweated. 'But happily, happily,' his lips moved, 'I know now - oh, thank God, they never got me to take a professor's job. Happily — ' Shades of his uncles Guillaume and Robert arose and he saw their heads together with his mother's over the long waxed table.

'He is a born lawyer : that's it.'

'Yes, Michel will become a judge, no doubt whatever.'

But now there he sat, the brilliant polemic orator of the past and felt mellow; his anxiety was

dissolving, and he had no right, he felt, to expound anything whatever, out of all he knew and had stored up in all these years.

(Scene Fifty-nine: "Time Forward, Time Abolished", pp.475-6)

The picture presented here of a man circumscribed by his social background is not unprecedented in Stead's work. In fact it is a recurring theme in the novels that have been examined in this study, and it links the figure of Alphendéry with those of Joseph Baguenault and Elvira Western. All of them struggle to free themselves from their social background and in fact achieve a clear awareness of their dilemma, but are finally reconciled to their situations, accepting them with a new freedom that comes from understanding. Alphendéry is ultimately able to reconcile, to some extent, these two conflicting sides of his nature by going into partnership with Léon, who is skilful enough to combine his money-making with his socialist sympathies.

The most obvious point to be made about Alphendéry's friendship with Jules is that, like his relationship with the bank itself, it is fraught with incongruities and tensions. Jules and Michel are opposites in many important respects; Jules is self-centred, amoral and cynical, while Michel is compassionate, acutely moral and idealistic. A further profound difference - one that considerably modifies the nature of the antithesis between them - is that while Michel has a rational, intellectual understanding of the world, Jules has an intuitive and anti-rational outlook. His decisions are based on his faith in his instincts and his luck. Bomba's description of the second, private face of financial giants - "their face of superstition, mental chaos, and childish absurdity" - is perfectly applicable to Jules, as Michel is of course aware (Scene Fifty-five: "Bomba", p.441). The following exchange between Michel and the brothers William and Jules illustrates this particular contrast well. Jules wants to get rid of Raccamond because his instincts tell him that "'he's bad luck'". Michel ridicules his superstitiousness and his egotism. Of course, later developments show that Jules's

instincts were right all along - one of the novel's minor ironies.

'I'm superstitious about him ... I said I wouldn't have anything to do with him. That's what I said from the beginning. He must be a fool. He's a Flying Dutchman ... always appears in storms, always scuds before a shipwreck! He's bad luck!'

Alphendéry laughed hopelessly. 'How can you be so primitive, Jules? You're no better than an Australian black with your superstitions.'

'You're crazy,' said William with disgust.

'What's the use of being rich if you can't be crazy?' flung out Jules. 'I have ideas and I pay other people to carry them out. They may sound crazy but they're right because I pay for them. And then, I'm lucky. You may argue right and I may sound wrong, but I've got the wind with me and so I'm right even if I'm wrong.'

'What a race of liars you all are!' sighed Alphendéry. 'You work day and night at your schemes and then you love to pretend it's all pure luck; you just lie on your back with your mouth open and luck throws in pâté de foie gras.'

(Scene Forty-three: "Polite Money", pp.310-11)

Michel's affection for Jules is hardly in evidence here, and in fact the mutual hostility shown here points to one of the most obvious incongruities of their relationship - rather than setting aside the profound and irreconcilable opposition that exists between their respective outlooks, Jules and Michel constantly reassert this opposition, so that their relationship, while undoubtedly based on mutual feelings of affection, is carried on as a series of more or less heated ideological confrontations. Of course it would be a mistake to take these at face value; most often they are merely deriving perverse amusement from each other. A more extended illustration of the situation exemplified by the passage above occurs in Scene Forty-seven, appropriately entitled "Jules Dreams".

Of course the reverse situation, in which Jules debunks Alphendéry's idealism with his characteristic trenchancy, also arises quite frequently. Jules is baffled by Alphendéry's reluctance to take financial advantage of his position in the bank, and prefers to regard it as sheer stupidity, as the following exchange reveals. Michel has asked for an overdraft, but insists that he will repay it.

Jules let out the most exasperated long laugh Michel had ever heard. He got up and walked up and down the room, looking at Michel glumly from time to time. Then he said angrily, 'Michel, take it for a present. Good God, I don't want it back. Why don't you get yourself some suits, Michel? Why don't you provide for yourself? Who's going to know? I don't give a damn. One of these days, there'll be some sort of a smash, and no one will be better off for your modesty.'

'It's not in my heart to take money I don't earn, Jules.'

Jules was quite acid. 'You're a fool, Michel.'

(Scene Forty-nine: "Various Matters", pp.352-3)

Perhaps ^{the} most memorable of Jules's puncturings of Michel's moralizing tone comes when Michel denounces the corrupting influence that the bank has on people. The following extract begins with the concluding sentence of Michel's attack, much of which has been reproduced previously.

'It's an insane asylum you run, Jules. I can't stand it : how can you?'

Jules came down on the two front legs of his chair, long in the air, and said soberly, 'People of my class pay an awful lot for mental specialists. If I didn't get them, some Freud or Fraud would.... What do you care about these poor squibs of men, Alphendéry?'

'I love men, Jules.'

Jules raised his eyebrows, surprised.

'That's a prejudice, Alphendéry. Most people don't get on because of some old prejudice.

Drop them and have a couple of crazy superstitions like me : you'll make more money.'

(Scene Thirty-four: "Five Cents and the Million Dollars", p.234)

As an example of a more extended and evenly balanced exchange between Jules and Michel, Scene Twenty-six: "No Money in Working for a Living", from which quotation has already been made, is probably unparalleled in the novel. Among the most revealing statements made in this scene are those in which one or other of them tries to brow-beat the other into submission to his own set of values. These attempts at persuasion are made in a fully serious tone, and bespeak a profound inability in each one to accept that the opposition between them is real and irrevocable. Both of them try to dismiss this opposition as merely a

vehicle for perverse game-playing but neither the reader nor the adversary is at all convinced by any of these attempts. Jules wants to close the bank and abscond with its funds, but Alphendéry, partly out of concern for his own reputation, tries to persuade Jules to persevere in it. Jules insists that Michel would accompany him in his flight.

'Won't you be with me? You're not thinking of leaving me, Michel? You wouldn't do that? We're together in everything, aren't we? You're not really serious about this socialist boloney?'

(Scene Twenty-six: "No Money in Working for a Living", p.194)

Jules tries to force Michel to put his affection for him above his ideological commitment, but Michel is not ready to make a choice between them, and makes no reply. In his attempts to persuade Jules of the value of his bank and his reputation to him, Michel uses the same ploy of trying to make his friend conform to his own preferred image of him, of trying to improve him by overlooking his unattractive aspects, however obvious. Revealing his distaste for scandal, Michel tells Jules. "'You're a great and a good man, Jules. I don't want you to ruin yourself'" and later persists in this idealizing vein with "'you are a creative man'" and "'you are fine and fertile'" (Scene Twenty-six: pp.196-8). As passages previously quoted reveal, Jules is no more likely to be moved by such calls to virtue than Michel is by exhortations to renounce his socialist ideals. Of course there is a considerable degree of self-deception on both sides in these statements. Each one knows the other far too well to entertain seriously the comfortable image of him that he presents here.

The true feelings of Jules and Michel for one another are complex and constantly changing, but the general outlines can be established fairly briefly, again with some reference to Scene Twenty-six. It should be pointed out that Jules has an inordinate capacity for self-deception, as Michel revealed earlier in relation to his inflated pride in his own cleverness. Although he will not admit it to himself, Jules is strongly persuaded by Michel's Marxist polemics, and has enormous respect for his intellect. It is revealing

of his high regard for Michel that when speaking of his children, Jules expresses the intention in relation to his youngest and only intelligent son, to "'make him'" not a banker but "'a professor'" (p.196). A little earlier in the novel he reveals quite explicitly to Michel that he knows that his Marxist analysis of the capitalist system is valid. In response to Michel's suggestion that he "'build an important private bank'", Jules turns Michel's own words against him to support his contention that capitalism is on the brink of destruction, and that the only sensible course is to make a quick profit and abscond with it.

'I don't want to play along with them : I want to sell the whole works short from now to kingdom come. I'm not building any great private bank. What for? I wouldn't put my sons into banking. I don't hang on till I get wrinkled, fat, and raucous. I don't want to marry my sons into the Union Artistique and the Jockey Club. Say, one of these days, those Reds are going to get some sense and start a gunpowder plot at the Jockey Club and the kidneys of the omnium engineers will be found sticking to the Eiffel Tower. I thought you thought a revolution was coming? I'm not one of the Comtesse's crowd who think the revolution is coming the day after they die. If the workers knew what I know about myself, I'd leave for Vishnupland tonight : and one of these days, some Michel, or some other fellow, is going to put them wise.'

(Scene Twenty-four: "Against Michel",
p.181)

Later on in the novel, Jules's attitude towards Michel changes, and he begins to accept the view put by his self-appointed surrogate father, Richard Plowman, that Alphendéry's Marxist ideas have weakened his morale, and are to blame for the decline in his fortunes - "'Things were going well before. This Red talk is jinx talk. He's got to stop it.'" (Scene Fifty-two: "Rumor", p.390). Of course this is self-deceiving nonsense, but characteristic of Jules, as he has made all his money by predicting declines in stocks and company crashes, and is, in Michel's phrase, a 'constitutional bear". Nevertheless this attitude becomes entrenched in Jules's mind and is a contributing factor in the breakdown of his relationship with Michel.

An interpretation of Jules's change of attitude towards Michel's "Red talk" that is both consonant with the ironic vision of the novel as a whole and consistent with Jules's capacity for self-deception, is that it is a defensive response, revealing, paradoxically, a weakening of his resistance of Michel's socialist ideals. This is never explicitly suggested in the novel, but in view of the many ironies and contradictions involved in their relationship, it is an interpretation that cannot be ruled out, and that has a pleasing congruence with the ironic mode of presentation that so pervades the novel.

As for Michel's feelings for Jules, these are best revealed perhaps by his analysis, previously quoted, of the relationship between Jules and his bank. Predictably, he has a more clear-sighted and considered view of Jules than Jules has of him, but ultimately - and this passage expresses this well - his feelings for Jules are dominated by a sense of wonder, a feeling that Jules is not of this earth, but is rather, a spirit-like, hardly physical creature of supernatural, magical gifts, perhaps a modern incarnation of Mercury himself.

'I know you so well, Jules. Don't give up this solid universe : don't float back into the air. Your feet are winged : unless you chain yourself by a golden chain to something on earth, you will join the worthless, fleshless creatures who float round our enterprises, our tenements of commerce, trying to get in. I know you : you don't exist apart from your bank, just the same as it would decay, until one could put his fist through the walls, if you were to leave it. Someone might buy it up, true, but it would not be this bank, this strange palace of illusion, temptation, and beauty. The beauty of this place is you, Jules. Its soul is you. And you are it. Don't leave it.'

(Scene Twenty-six: "No Money in Working for a Living", p.198)

Despite his clear-sighted awareness of Jules's faults, Michel is, as this passage indicates, just as much under the spell of Jules's charm as his clients are. His repeated assertion that he "loves" Jules lends further support to this view.

As much of the foregoing discussion has indicated, perhaps, there are distinct overtones of the conjugal

relationship in the relationship between Jules and Michel. While based on mutual affection, it takes the form of an adversary relationship in its day-to-day workings. Both of them are constantly touching on its problematic and painful areas in a positively perverse manner, that anticipates in some measure the infinitely more painful and destructive probings of Sam and Henny Pollitt in Stead's next novel, The Man Who Loved Children. This conjugal aspect of the relationship between Jules and Michel is strongly suggested by the following passage. William Bertillon, whose important role can only be briefly referred to by this discussion, figures largely in this incident. He is also very close to Michel, and in the conjugal analogy (in which, incidentally, Michel takes the role of wife) his role is analogous to that of Jules's mother. After a long absence, Jules returns to the bank with his conceit inflated by his sycophantic parasites Bomba and Raccamond, who blame all his difficulties on William and Michel. William acts quickly to deflate his pride, by giving him a distinctly maternal reproof. Having defended himself against anticipated charges of incompetence, he turns to Michel's defence. Jules, though somewhat intimidated by William's verbal attack, remains unrepentant and persists in trying to shift the blame onto William and Michel.

The two brothers faced each other with a certain repose now. Jules wanted to keep up a pretense of anger but had no heart for it. William's apology had healed the rankling hurt. William saw it and pressed home. 'Another thing. Alphendéry. What's the idea of writing to everyone that he was no good. You're so clever that you can't get your bus off the grass without smashing yourself up and yet you know what's going on up here, by second sight. You know Michel is loyal and you damn well know how hard he works. We all do. Now, he wants to resign.'

'Let him resign. He nearly ruined me, with his despair philosophy.'

'Said Mr. Richard Plowman. What's the use of talking to you?'

'I want to see the position of the clients.'

'O.K. Come and see them. Michel's in there making up margin calls. You've scarcely seen him since you came back.'

'Shut up! Leave me alone. You give me a headache.' The brothers were silent for a minute.

Jules said in a lower tone, 'Who's talking about either of you leaving me? They pestered me down there. You don't know what a hole I was in. I suffered too. Don't tell anyone that. If you or Michel had come down they wouldn't have been so thick around me. Blame yourselves.'

(Scene Fifty-eight: "Return", pp.472-3)

Despite William's well-intentioned efforts to re-establish the relationship of Jules and Michel on its formerly affectionate basis, their "marriage" is already well on the way to disintegration.

Some consideration has been given to the factors involved in Jules's change of attitude towards Michel, but, as the breakdown of their relationship is brought about by ill-feeling on both sides, it is necessary to give at least brief attention to the change in Michel's feelings. With characteristic honesty, the author makes no attempt to single out any one factor as crucial; a variety of factors, both explicit and implicit, is involved. As was pointed out earlier, Michel establishes a close relationship with Henri Léon quite early in the novel. As is indicated by Michel's skill as interpreter for the incoherent Léon, a remarkable rapport exists between them, perhaps partly attributable to the Jewish background that they have in common. In addition to this, Léon has a high regard for Michel's professional judgement and ability, and this is in contrast with the disturbing signs of disrespect in Jules's behaviour towards Michel. For example, Jules orders him to leave the room at the request of the absurd, litigious businessmen Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, and later sends him to London at Raccamond's insistence, but instructs him to stay away from the London branch, and amuse himself (Scene Sixty-five: "The Gemini Angry"; Scene Ninety: "Aristide's Friends"). For his part, Michel admires Léon's ability to combine, with great ingenuity, his desire to make money with his desire to help the cause of the working class. Léon's brilliant wheat scheme, which would have yielded him a huge profit as well as helping the struggling Russian economy, illustrates this ability very well (Scene Fifty-three: "The Wheat Scheme"). Significantly perhaps, for Michel, it was Jules and his

absurdly conceited sycophant Bomba who ruined Léon's plan through the heavy-handedness and sheer stupidity of their attempt to put it into effect. A further attraction of Léon's from Michel's point of view, as he points out at the very end of the novel, is that Léon deals in commodities, in "'tangible goods'", while Jules's business is exclusively paper transactions (Scene One Hundred and Four: "What Avatar?" p.785). As earlier quotations have revealed, Michel is appalled by the "unreality" of the world of the Banque Mercure, and so the relative concreteness of Léon's operations seems an attractive alternative, especially as his ideological commitment will suffer less compromise, and less ridicule, in his partnership with Léon.

Happily the relationship of Jules and Michel never reaches the point of open, and serious, hostility. Although Jules tells William repeatedly that he wants Michel to leave the bank, he never reveals this wish to Michel directly. The result is that Michel gains the impression from Jules's behaviour that it is his purely monetary system of values that is the basis of his disrespect. Immediately after his long analysis of the "unreality" of the bank, he suggests to Jean Frère that it is only a sort of conspiracy among the clients and the employees of the bank that allows it to exist:

'The employees at the bank, and their idea of the bank, are real, too,; said Jean.

'No,' said Michel, not able to bear a good world on the bank, 'no, because they're secretly in league with Jules and the rich people they serve.... They believe Jules's dictum implicitly.'

'That is?' queried Jean Frere.

'A man's salary is a rough measure of his ability.'

(Scene Eighty: "Measure of Brains", p.629)

Although the reference to his own position is not explicit, the reader cannot help recalling the many occasions on which Jules shows contempt for Michel's reluctance to profit from his position. In this context, the application of "'Jules's dictum'" would mean, of course, that Jules has a low regard for Michel's ability, commensurate with the salary that he draws. The example of Raccamond, who insists on a handsome

salary, provides support for this comment on Jules's attitude to his employees, and, by implication, to all men. Just how important this money-based valuation of men is in Jules's attitude towards Michel is difficult to determine, but there is no doubt that it is present, as Jules's attempt to entice Michel back to him with promises of money has already indicated (Scene Ninety-three: "Restitution", pp.709-10).

When Jules and Michel part for the last time, however, they do so amicably. A comparison between their final, parting words and Michel's summation of his association with Jules is revealing of their contrasting assessments of the value of their relationship. Typically, Jules flatters himself to the last; Michel, however, makes a more sober and perhaps more accurate assessment of its value to him. At the beginning of the first of these passages, where Michel and Jules are saying goodbye, Jules pretends to be interested in Michel's new job with Léon —

'Will you like your new job?'

'Léon is a petty tyrant - but I'll get along all right. I may not stay there long.'

'Ah, you'll come back to me, Michel; you'll be back with me before you know it. You need me. I give you rein. You'll find out.'

Michel laughed. 'Maybe! who knows?'

(Scene Ninety-nine: "Judges Like Serials", pp.754-5)

After the Bertillons have fled to the tax-haven of Esthonia, a Dutch businessman asks Michel if he has any plans to rejoin Jules there. Michel makes it clear that he wants no further involvement with Jules and his "'sterile business'".

'Will you ever have any idea of going to Esthonia for a visit?'

Alphendéry laughed. 'No, I'm through with finance for ever and a day. I'm in tangible goods now. You are afraid I will go in again with Bertillon?'

Rhys's beryl eyes glinted pleasantly. 'Yes, I am afraid. You see, you are too fond of him.'

— 'I have other dreams now : I'm getting older. I've given my whole youth to this sterile business. I'm not a boy any longer. I never thought the day would come when I would feel as independent and - cold as I feel today.... Myself first, the rest nowhere; that's not blatant - that's what finance has brought me down to ... Maybe I'll get out of it some day.'

(Scene One Hundred and Four: "What Avatar?", p.785)

It was pointed out in the preamble to this discussion that House of All Nations is far more than a Marxist indictment of the capitalist system, and the discussion itself has surely provided support for this view. Obviously the clearest single indication of this is that insofar as the novel has a villain it is not the cynical capitalist Jules Bertillon but the self-righteous bourgeois Raccamond, who tries to restore propriety to the bank's operations, and in the process leads to its dissolution. Of course the novel does not endorse the capitalist system as represented by the Banque Mercure, but rather, through a detailed and apparently authenticated revelation of its operations, shows the bank, and by implication the capitalist system as a whole, to be profoundly fragile, its apparent solidity an illusion. Perhaps the only thing that sustains this fragile entity is, to extend Alphendéry's observation, the widespread conspiracy to believe in its money-dominated system of values (Scene Eighty: "Measure of Brains", p.629). This is surely one of the implications of the career of Raccamond. The error that marks him as a fool is his assumption that the bank is a solid, ownable, object like the beautiful laces and silverware of his friends the Hallers, that he and Marianne so covet. His materialistic outlook prevents him from recognizing that the bank is no more than a shell that has life only when Jules - its "soul", in Michel's words - is present. To put it another way, so that the optimistic implications for the cause of socialism become more apparent, he overlooked the essential, vivifying, but unstable human element without which the bank and the whole capitalist system are nothing. Although Stead is understandably reluctant to see her characters as representative of social classes, it seems valid to draw at least tentative general conclusions from the case of Raccamond, and to suggest that his profound lack of understanding of the capitalist system in which he seeks to prosper is representative of the benighted situation of the bourgeoisie as a whole, upon which the capitalist system relies for the ideological and political support that enables it to survive. This is one of the underlying, but pointed ironies of the novel, that contribute

to its remarkable, and perhaps ironic, inner strength.

In its determination to expose as illusory one of the comfortable assumptions of bourgeois society - in this case, the assumption that banks are solid, secure, and respectable institutions - House of All Nations embodies one of the central concerns of Stead's work as a whole, a concern that finds its first expression, as this study has revealed, in The Beauties and Furies, and its most profound expression in The Man Who Loved Children. In the figure of Raccamond there is evidence of a new and important understanding of the extent to which an individual's perception of the world around him can be crippled by his unquestioned ideological assumptions. Whereas in Seven Poor Men of Sydney it is the liberating influence of a cogent ideological structure that is most emphasized, and in The Beauties and Furies it is the capacity of ideological pretensions to conceal a person's true nature, in Raccamond it is this capacity of deeply entrenched assumptions to prevent a clear perception of external reality that is discovered and conveyed persuasively. This discovery of Stead's becomes quite central in The Man Who Loved Children, where it is the basis of her understanding, and presentation of its central figure, Sam Pollit .

Of course Raccamond, while an important figure, is hardly central to this novel's view of character and ideology. It is to Jules and Michel that the reader must look in order to find the novel's distinctive vision of the complexities of character. Perhaps the most illuminating way of describing this is to relate it to the novel's vision of the bank itself, so closely analogous is it in important respects to the nature of Jules and Michel. The failure of Raccamond's approach to the bank can, in this context, be seen as a cautionary tale that points to the approach to the world and to personality in particular, that is endorsed, implicitly, by the novel as a whole. Just as the bank's façade is deceptive, so is the façade of words and manners of Michel and Jules deceptive; moral outrage when the full truth is revealed is as foolish and futile in relation to them as it is in relation to the bank. Neither the bank nor the figure of Jules nor the figure of Michel is what it seems on the

surface, but neither is it simply the opposite of what it seems. They are all complex and paradoxical entities, with widely various, even opposite aspects. The bank has many faces; it is sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly, and, as Alphendéry recognizes, is in some respects entirely unreal. Similarly, Jules and Michel display apparently contradictory aspects; Jules has personal charm, but in fact cares nothing for other people; Michel is ideologically a Marxist, but professionally a capitalist. To fasten onto any particular aspect of the bank, or of these characters, and proclaim it as the only reality, as Raccamond does, is plainly foolishness. The novel's central vision of character, and of reality - and between these the bank provides the link - is a profoundly ironic and dualistic one, that embraces both appearance and reality without devaluing either. The epigraph which, as has been suggested, could stand as Stead's "Credo" in writing the novel, expresses this precisely.

On est dédommagé de la perte de son
innocence par celle de ses préjugés. Dans la
société des méchants, où le vice se montre à
masque levé, on apprend à les connaître.

— Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau

The almost obsessive determination to reveal the unvarnished truth that characterizes Stead's best work is well reflected by this epigraph. The novel to which it is appended is surely the first that can justly be included in "Stead's best work".

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The most obvious advances in Stead's work between Seven Poor Men of Sydney and House of All Nations, the advances in stylistic self-discipline, are outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless considerable advances in Stead's work have been in evidence within the present area of interest. Many of these have already been pointed out, but it seems appropriate to attempt at this stage to sum up the general outlines of the development in Stead's work that has been revealed in the course of discussion of the novels. There are dangers, of course, in attempting to delineate clear chronological developments in the work of any artist, but the general conclusions shown here can rely, to some extent at least, on the body of the study for substantiation.

Seven Poor Men of Sydney is well described by Dorothy Green as "a novel ... about ideas rather than people".¹ The story of its hero, Joseph Baguenault, constitutes a neat demonstration of the truth of Baruch Mendelssohn's analysis of the conflict between religious faith and human reason. Moreover, the novel's central dramatic and structural contrast is based on the Baruchian conception of the fundamental human conflict between the forces of Light - humanism, reason, order, hope - and the forces of Darkness - religious faith, disorder, irrationality and ignorance. In the final analysis, the novel is a straightforward polemic against the established Church, and in favour of human reason and more particularly, in favour of Marxism as a cogent and liberating alternative interpretation of the situation of the ordinary "poor man". It is strongly suggested by both the internal and the external, biographical evidence, that Stead was heavily influenced by the ideas of William Blake/Baruch Mendelssohn when she wrote this novel. While the novel displays, on the whole, a youthful enthusiasm for ideas in general and Marxist ideology in particular, it is worth pointing out that there are already signs of the scepticism and the concern for the truth that characterizes the best of Stead's later novels.

1. Green, op.cit., 153.

These signs can be seen in her presentation of some of the minor characters, the value of whose ideological commitments is treated with an almost uncharitable scepticism, in the reservations that the story of Joseph reveals in relation to the Marxist political analysis, and in the novel's polemical method of attempting to demonstrate, not merely assert, the validity of the rationalist - Marxist critique of the Church and the capitalist system.

The Beauties and Furies, although a far less successful novel on the whole than Seven Poor Men, consolidates and extends the advances shown in The Salzburg Tales in Stead's understanding and presentation of the relationship between ideology and personality. Now more interested in people with ideas, than with ideas for their own sake, Stead takes up the sceptical view of ideologues shown in relation to the minor characters of Seven Poor Men, and in The Beauties and Furies creates a memorable portrait of a pretentious bourgeois ideologue to whom Marxism is merely a means of making himself attractive to women. This figure, Oliver Fenton, is one of the most memorable characters in Stead's oeuvre, and derives power from the hostility that Stead puts into its creation. This novel, like The Salzburg Tales, contains no clear endorsement of Marxist ideology in the way that Seven Poor Men does; rather it is concerned with exposing the hypocrisy and emptiness of a particular individual, and in doing this it serves a second purpose, that of exposing the bourgeois conception of romance as an illusion, an impossibility. This is the thesis that is demonstrated by the dramatic action of the novel; the polemical method of Seven Poor Men reappears largely unchanged.

After a disappointing second novel, Stead goes on, in House of All Nations, to fulfil the highest hopes of those who saw promise in Seven Poor Men. She does so in a rather unexpected way, however, because unlike Seven Poor Men with its flamboyant style and poetic vision, House of All Nations is above all a triumph of controlled and disciplined artistry. The self-consciously poetic and fantastic passages are conspicuously absent from this novel, and the fragmenting diversity of Seven Poor Men is replaced by a homogeneity of

approach that is an important contributing factor in the remarkable coherence of this huge novel.

Artistic control is best displayed perhaps in Stead's presentation of character in this novel. It is consistently detached, sceptical and ironic, in contrast with the ideological and personal partisanship displayed in her treatment of character in the earlier novels. This novel's analysis of the relationship between ideology and personality is a complex, ironic one. The presentation of Raccamond emphasizes the capacity of ideological and moral prejudices to prevent an understanding of immediate reality, and while Raccamond is an unattractive character, this emphasis brings to the fore the pathetic and foolish aspects of his position. The presentation of Jules and Michel, the novel's central figures, reveals a more complex and sympathetic understanding of the place of ideology in relation to personality. The ideological pronouncements of both of these characters, while undoubtedly expressing some aspect of personality, are contradicted by some aspect of their behaviour; the Marxist Michel is in professional collaboration with the capitalists, while the cynical, even misanthropic capitalist Jules has a natural personal charm that gives rise to feelings of affection in all those around him, and he is close to, and surely influenced by, the Marxist humanitarian Michel. These contradictions are not seen as indicative of hypocrisy, however; rather they are accepted as an inherent condition of personality, which is seen as multi-faceted and elusive, evading all definitive analysis or judgement. The Banque Mercure shares these attributes with the personalities of Jules and Michel, and it is the link that is established between the novel's vision of the bank and its vision of personality that is crucial to its remarkable success. It is crucial in two main respects : firstly it reveals the single, distinctive and coherent vision behind the novel that is the basis of its structural strength and aesthetic coherence; secondly it leads to a mutual strengthening of the novel's two major analyses - of the incongruities and ironies of personality, and of the ironies and profound fragility of the bank and the capitalist system that it

represents. When this novel is recognized as the tour de force of novelistic artistry that it is, it will surely take its place alongside The Man Who Loved Children as one of the greatest achievements of Christina Stead's literary career.

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